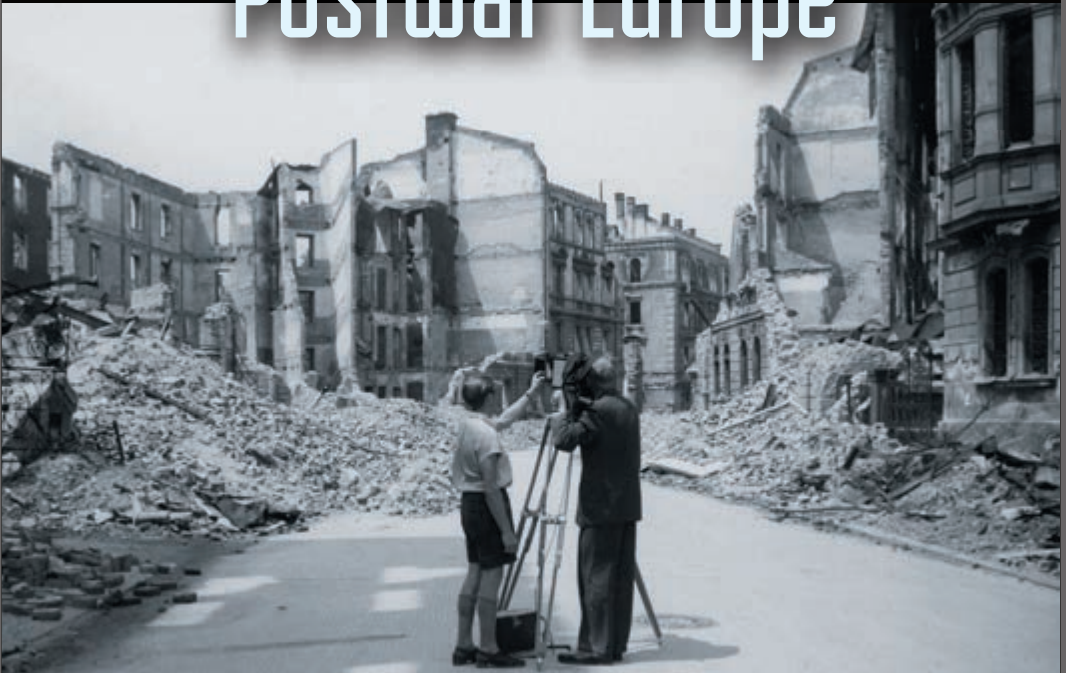


FILM  
CULTURE

IN TRANSITION

# Non-Fiction Cinema in Postwar Europe



Visual Culture and the Reconstruction of Public Space

EDITED BY

LUCIE ČESÁLKOVÁ

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PERRINE VAL

PAOLO VILLA

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

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At a time of rising extremism in Europe and the temptation to retreat into nationalism, we hope to make a contribution to transnational and interdisciplinary openness, by recalling the challenges but also the enthusiasm that characterized the post-Second World War period, which sometimes still defines our daily lives.

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# Preface: (Re)building Europe through Cinema (Studies)

*Vinzenz Hediger*

Cinema emerged at around the same time as the new discipline of sociology discovered the figure of the anonymous mass—in the late nineteenth century. For a long time, cinema was treated as the paradigmatic mass art of modernity. Emphasizing the point in a critical perspective, the French filmologues, the first academic film scholars of the postwar era, went so far as to hold cinema accountable for its role in the civilizational rupture of fascism, and they sought to understand cinema's power in order to better regulate it. Only more recently has cinema been understood as an emphatically democratic art: As an epitome of the participatory, open space of the modern public sphere and an emblem of democracy. Authors as diverse as Alain Badiou, Miriam Hansen and Ashish Rajadhyaksha have pointed out that cinema not only reflects but has the potential to shape and sustain democracy. According to Claude Lefort the location of power in a monarchy is the body of the king, and the location of power in democracy is an empty space, a "*lieu vide*," in which the demos, the true source of power in democracy, takes shape. The cinema is paradigmatic case of such an empty space: an art form which can elevate anybody to a position of visibility and temporary power on the screen, and which does so for an audience of which anybody can be a part in the cinema hall.

But how exactly does cinema do the work of democracy, of configuring the demos, of shaping and reshaping the polity on the screen and in the theater?

This book results from a research project which looked for answers to this question by focusing on the representation of the postwar destruction and reconstruction of public spaces in European postwar fiction films from 1945 to 1956. The project, which went under the acronym ViCTOR-E ("Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration and Reconstruction in Post-WWII Europe") and ran from 2019 to 2022, brought together a team of researchers from France, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Germany. The researchers

located, analyzed, and, in cases where the films were not readily available, digitized non-fiction films with a particular view to how they showed public spaces and, in the process, visually and rhetorically constructed notions of citizenship in post-World War II Europe. The main outcome, apart from this book, is a virtual exhibition entitled “Frames of Reconstruction” and designed for use in classrooms and lecture halls, but also with a view to the broader public.<sup>1</sup> What the films showed, and what the exhibition documents, were multiple and layered notions of citizenship and democracy, but also a rich set of connections and continuities. These cut across national boundaries as well as the Cold War divides between liberal and people’s democracies. What the project’s progress made clear was that cinema histories in Europe, and more specifically the history of cinema and democratic polities in Europe, cannot be neatly compartmentalized along political and ideological boundaries. Understanding these histories require the work of teams whose background and perspectives transcend national horizons.

By forming such a team, ViCTOR-E made a contribution not just to our understanding of Europe’s past, but towards building Europe’s future.

“Europe” today is, among other things, a union of twenty-seven states within boundaries defined by two seminal events, World War II and the disintegration of the Soviet empire after 1989. The EU can perhaps best be described as a set of regulatory algorithms which create an integrated space for the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people (and which also bind anyone wanting to share in the benefits of the set of regulatory algorithms without being a full member of club, as the former twenty-eighth member found out upon leaving). Embedded in this European space of free movement is the project of a European research area, a shared sphere for the exchange of ideas and knowledge. The aspirational core of the European research space is to bring the various national university systems closer together. If the four freedoms facilitate the free flow of goods, capital, services, and people, the European research space aims to facilitate the free flow of ideas, concepts, research designs, and, once again, people. There is an ongoing debate about the democratic legitimacy of European institutions and procedures (think of the complaints about “unelected” Brussels bureaucrats), even though the European council, the EU’s main executive body, consists of the (more, or in the case of Hungary, less) democratically elected heads of government. But what the European research area does achieve, not least through the actions of the European Research Council, which funded ViCTOR-E through the Humanities in the European Research

1 <https://www.frames-reconstruction.eu>

Area (HERA) program, is the creation of a level playing field where, as in the EU council, every vote counts equally, and not just those of (former and current) regional hegemonies like Germany and France. An important part of what this project tried to achieve was to consolidate this level playing field, with a view to future studies, which can, as the results of this project show, only be European in scope.

The task ahead, however, is daunting. On February 24, 2022, the center of Europe shifted east. The distance from Frankfurt, where this text is being written, to Lviv, is the same as the distance from Lviv to Mariupol. The successor state of the Soviet empire, the Russian Federation, has worked hard to contest the boundaries of the new Europe—in Transnistria since the early 1990s, in Georgia since 1994 and, most violently, in the Russo-Ukrainian War, which started with the occupation of Donbas and Crimea in 2014 and led to a full-scale invasion in 2022. This war has been described as a “proxy war” between Russia and NATO, not least by so-called “realist” international relations scholars who cling to notions of Russia as a superpower and who wish to accord this superpower a so-called “sphere of influence” in which “buffer states” have no choice but subject themselves to the rule of the regional hegemon. But what Ukraine is fighting for and has been fighting for since the Maidan Revolution in 2014, which triggered Russia’s annexation of Luhansk, Donetsk, and Crimea, is adherence to a different space: The European space of the four freedoms (which includes and implies the European research area). Ukraine faces a choice between governing oneself in accordance with the EU’s set of regulatory algorithms or disappearing into a colonial empire with a long history of genocidal expansionism. It is a war in which the humanities play a more important role than one might think. As a matter of fact, the humanities share some of the responsibility for Russia’s aggression. Many of the governing elites in Russia have a background in the humanities, particularly in area studies and linguistics. They represent an unbroken tradition of knowledge production in the service of empire. Russia’s war against Ukraine is also a conflict between this imperial and colonial tradition, which will face its moment of decolonization sooner or later, and a more equitable order of knowledge where everyone gets a vote, regardless of the size of territory from which they happen to hail.

When ViCTOR-E started this dimension of the project was not on the mind of anyone in the research team. As the project progressed it became increasingly clear that the proposal’s claim—that we would contribute towards the building of a truly integrated European research space—had a substantial political meaning. It came to imply an obligation and a commitment to a European research space whose center lies much further east than

hitherto imagined or indicated in our implicit mental maps. However small the contribution of a research project on a marginal subject in a marginal discipline towards such a commitment may be, this is now an important part of the meaning of the project's results.

# Frames of Reconstruction: An Introduction

*Lucie Česálková, Johannes Praetorius-Rhein, Perrine Val, and Paolo Villa*

## Abstract

In the process of recovering from WWII, European societies greatly relied on non-fiction cinema a fundamental means of communication, propaganda, and governmentality. In both the Western and the Eastern Bloc, documentaries, newsreels, and amateur production served the goal of rebuilding the war-devastated nations, reconfiguring their political, economic, and cultural spheres while dealing with the recent trauma of the conflict. Highlighting the concepts of spatiality, proxemics, and public space, this introduction intends to frame through a transnational perspective the complex media system and visual culture centered around non-fiction films, and how they were a major actor in shaping postwar Europe.

**Keywords:** postwar Europe, documentary film, non-fiction cinema, public space, visual culture, proxemics

Generally, “frame” refers to the cinematic image. Frames of reconstruction<sup>1</sup> are then images of and from the European postwar era and are connected to this historical context in multiple ways; as typical products of that time they are themselves contributions to the architectural, political, and social

<sup>1</sup> *Frames of Reconstruction* is an online exhibition about the era of postwar reconstruction as seen through non-fiction films from that time. It is one of the major results of the transnational research project “ViCTOR-E: Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration and Reconstruction in Post-WWII Europe” (<https://www.frames-reconstruction.eu/>). The title *Frames of Reconstruction* does not only indicate the aim to create “windows to the past” for a broader public with the exhibition, but can also stand for the process of academic research that is documented in this volume.

process of reconstruction that they represent and document. More specifically, “frame” can also refer to the physical filmstrip and the image that is delimited by frame lines and perforations. But the cinematic image is more and more detached from its carrier material through digitization; today, many of the films discussed in this volume can be accessed online.<sup>2</sup> Considering the amount and diversity of this material, a “frame” might also be understood in a more figurative sense, as the necessary self-restriction and limitation that is imperative for any analyses or research.

The ViCTOR-E project challenged certain analytical frameworks and emphasized others. While we have largely accepted the temporal definition of the postwar period, it was crucial for the transnational project to put its spatial dimensions into question. Therefore, we have not only challenged national categories of film historiography, but also the division of Europe into ideological blocs and through the Iron Curtain, just as we have looked at the entanglements of postwar and postcolonial European history outside the continent. Thus, rather than implicitly adopting concepts such as the nation, the Iron Curtain, or the “civilized world,” we are interested in how non-fiction films have contributed to the formation of such and other spatial orders and to think about cinema itself in various terms of spatiality. Allowing us to cast and concentrate our gaze—and so assuming the traditional functions of the frame (Marin 2001)—on different yet interconnected images reflecting cultural memory and trauma, social and ideological representations, publicness and collective space, the public and private divide, visual and media cultures and politics, non-fiction films constantly frame and reframe our understanding of postwar time and of cinema itself within that historical context.

From these “frames,” however, we do not want to form a stable and rigid methodological framework, but rather to bring them into ever new constellations—metaphorically speaking, to follow the principle of cinematic montage, not that of building a house.

## Time Frames

If the beginning of the postwar period is identified as 1945 (or even 1944 in the case of the very first territories liberated by the Allies), historiography

2 The ViCTOR-E project contributed to this new accessibility by creating a digital film collection on the online portal European Film Gateway, providing access to hundreds of non-fiction films in full length (<https://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/content/VICTOR-E-project>).

nevertheless agrees that this year should not be considered as a clear-cut tipping point between the Second World War and the “postwar” period. On the contrary, historians look at the forms of persistence, intertwining, and even continuity of certain forms of violence or domination, as well as representations and, in more recent works, emotions (Judt 2005; Ellwood 1992; Modlinger and Sonntag 2011). The slowness of the conflict’s end, the “slow withdrawal from the war” as Cabanes and Piketty argue (2007, 3), was materially embodied in the long reconstruction of cities and infrastructures bombed during the war. While the historian Danièle Voldman (1997, 3) notes, for example, that in France, from 1953 onwards, construction took precedence over reconstruction,<sup>3</sup> the reconstruction of certain cities sometimes lasted until the 1960s, that is, for twenty years, and above all, it has given rise to debates to this day (as exemplified by the construction work on the new old town of Frankfurt am Main carried out during the 2010s). Moreover, the postwar period was concretely rooted in the war, since various processes of reconstruction were prepared and decided upon before the armistice was signed. Whether it was political decisions taken by governments in exile (for example, the Czechoslovak government prepared the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from its exile in London) or the creation of new cultural organizations (German communist film professionals conceived the film company DEFA from Moscow), the postwar period was partly prepared, discussed, and imagined well before the end of the conflict. Besides, the fighting continued not only after May 1945, with the surrender of Japan in September, but above all, new conflicts started immediately. The borders of the former colonial empires shrank sharply as wars of independence broke out in Asia and Africa. In Algeria, which was still a French colony at the time, May 8, 1945, refers above all to the massacres in Sétif, Guelma, and Kherrata, when Algerians demanded freedom from the French invaders—demonstrations that were bloodily repressed, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of people. The Indochina War began in December 1946 and since then France has been at war almost continuously as the main belligerent or as an ally, outside its national territory.

In the introduction to *Histories of the Aftermath*, Frank Biess (2010) shows that postwar refers less to a chronological period with clearly defined temporal markers than it provides an epistemological tool. The term “postwar” expresses the slow withdrawal from the war and in this way contradicts the optimistic national narratives that emerged in 1945 to encourage people to

3 Voldman also recalls that most of the laws legislating reconstruction were enacted in the first half of the 1940s in France.



turn away from the past and the war in order to imagine a better future. On the other hand, and this is one of the challenges of our volume, Biess questions the importance of national frameworks in the way postwar is defined and experienced. He then insists on the need to make transnational comparisons, not only between East and West. In addition to their material dimension, the aftereffects of the war are also emotional; the violence perpetrated and the trauma suffered have left their mark on all the populations affected by the conflict. About the post-WWI period, John Horne uses the term “cultural demobilization” (Horne 2002, 45–53) to emphasize that, even if the physical fighting was over (or moved to other continents), the postwar period is also about the renunciation of violence, the growth of the pacifist ideal, and the rehabilitation of the enemy. Regarding the post-WWII period in Germany, this “cultural demobilization” certainly evokes the attempts at “denazifying” or “re-educating” the German population, which were carried out in a largely empirical manner.

In this book, as in the research carried out by the ViCTOR-E project, the year 1956 has been chosen as the chronological end point. Like 1945, 1956 does not constitute a radical turning point either in history or in the history of cinema, but rather confirms the anchoring of certain transformations. The 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held in February 1956, confirmed the break with Stalinism, even if de-Stalinization also gave rise to anti-communist and anti-Soviet demonstrations in Poland and Hungary, which were violently repressed in autumn 1956. The year 1956 also confirmed the rise of television. If 1953 was the year of Stalin’s death, it was also the year of the first international live television broadcast of a major event, namely, the coronation of Elizabeth II. Within three years, more and more Europeans had acquired a television set. This new access to filmed images thus gradually ended the hegemony of the cinema as a provider of newsreels and feature films, a new competition that would change the production of fiction and non-fiction cinema.

## Public Space

The rise of television and with it the transformation of the living room—which had historically developed as a public space within the private household, but whose furnishings were now increasingly oriented toward the television set—appeared to many critics as a typical symptom of larger social processes, a retreat into the private sphere, and a depoliticized consumer culture. If one looks at the phase of European reconstruction from the end,

then it appears to be shaped by a great loss of public sphere. In Western Europe cities had arisen from the ruins, whose transformed cityscapes were characterized by functional differentiation. Urbanists aimed to define separate areas for work, housing, and consumption and to connect these with streets that were increasingly oriented toward motorized traffic. At the same time, the suburban single-family house was promoted as the ideal living model, which many saw as a personal goal during the efforts of reconstruction and which also became attainable.

Since the mid-1950s, however, a new generation of intellectuals vehemently criticized this “deurbanization.” They perceived the functionally segmented cities as “inhospitable” (Mitscherlich 1965), as “abstract” (Lefebvre 1970; 1991), as a “tool for controlling” (Tafuri 1964, 39), or even as “murdered” (Siedler and Niggemeyer 1964). These interventions were politically diverse and came from various disciplines but agreed in that they lamented a loss of public space. Hans Paul Bahrtdt, for example, argued that urbanity was created precisely by the close interweaving of private and public spaces, and that the rigid separation of spheres of life was destroying not only the city but also the foundations of democracy (Bahrtdt 1961). However, unlike theorists in the tradition of critical theory (Habermas 1989 [1962]; Negt and Kluge 1972) and the protest movements of the late 1960s, this criticism was not primarily about the public sphere as a political space, but about specific qualities of urban life. From this perspective, the public space threatened with loss was a space of mixing, where different functions, milieus, and classes would intersect and society would experience its own heterogeneity. In this sense, urban public space is characterized by a surplus because staying in it is not tied to a particular function. The prototype for this is the urban street, which is not simply a connecting line between two points, but in which different forms of movement are connected with different forms of looking:

It serves as a meeting place (topos), for without it no other designated encounters are possible (cafés, theaters, halls). These places animate the street and are served by its animation, or they cease to exist. In the street, a form of spontaneous theater, I become spectacle and spectator, and sometimes an actor. The street is where movement takes place, the interaction without which urban life would not exist, leaving only separation, a forced and fixed segregation. (Lefebvre 1970, 18)

These critiques of functionalist urbanism were of course primarily oriented toward developments in Western industrial societies. In Eastern Europe,

reconstruction was much more focused on public space, following the example of Soviet cities. This included, on the one hand, central places such as spacious squares and bombastic monuments, and, on the other hand, state control of markets and thus a loss of concentration of private entrepreneurs in the centers.

The ideologically charged monumentality of the central squares, decorated for the proper “celebrations” of the Communist Party’s glorious leadership, stood in stark contrast with the abundance of desolate, unkempt, and undifferentiated open spaces characterizing the majority of the urban landscape in the socialist city. (Stanilov 2007, 271)

In this respect, there was a loss here similar to that pointed out by the critics of Western European urban planning, for public space under socialism was precisely not an open space in which social heterogeneity could be experienced. At the latest, the suppressed uprisings in Czechoslovakia, the GDR, and Hungary made clear that the emptiness of public spaces under Soviet control could not be democratically appropriated, but served instead primarily as a parade ground for party events.

However, if we try to understand the project of reconstruction not from its end but from its beginning, there was no fear of losing public space but much rather the traumatic experience of a loss of private space. The postwar period in Europe begins as the end of fascist and Nazi rule, whose programs consisted in a total grip on people’s lives that led to military mobilization and culminated in the persecution, expulsion, and terrorization of large parts of Europe’s population. Subsequently, cities were bombed, villages destroyed, farms expropriated. After the war, displaced persons and prisoners of war crisscrossed the continent and were housed in collective camps, but often enough there was no home left to return to. The loss of private spaces and spaces of privacy might be seen as one of the very few shared experiences on a continent whose population was left divided into victors and defeated, liberators and liberated, perpetrators and victims.

The heart of this situation is expressed in the play *Draußen vor der Tür* (The outside man) written by Wolfgang Borchert in 1946, in which a soldier returns from the war but cannot find his way back into civilian life. Not only does he no longer find his hometown, which is completely bombed out, but above all he cannot find an apartment to stay, leaving or being rejected every time; he remains “outside the door.” He is trapped in the nightmare of a meaningless world into which he can neither enter, but which he also cannot leave. After its premiere as a radio and stage play in 1947, it resonated

strongly with German audiences and was later adapted for the screen as *Liebe 47* (Love '47, dir. Wolfgang Liebeneiner, GER-West, 1949). However, the motif of an impossible homecoming set a baseline for the entire “Trümmerfilme” genre in Germany, and can already be found in the DEFA film *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (The murderers are among us, dir. Wolfgang Staudte, GER-East, 1946). At least from a West German perspective, this situation changed quickly. Within only two years, the impossible homecoming had become the setup for the light-hearted satire *Berliner Ballade* (The Berliner, dir. R. A. Stemmle, GER-West, 1948), exploring the comical potentials of postwar living conditions: A man returns from war captivity, finds his flat occupied by others and can only move into a single room with an open outer wall, where he remains exposed to wind and weather. The protagonist with the later proverbial name “Otto Normalverbraucher”<sup>4</sup> experiences all kinds of strange adventures in this city of postwar scarcity, but little by little manages to rebuild a life for himself with a furnished room, a wife, and a job. Thus, in the end, “Otto Normalverbraucher” succeeds in burying the past and looking toward a better future.

This optimism of the film also comes out in an interesting framing narrative. At the beginning, the narrator addresses a fictitious audience from the future of the year 2048, who would either own a “telectinema” or see the film in a 3D cinema, and announces that we are about to see historical footage from the Museum of Photography. A future had become imaginable in which the images from this bizarre rubble world would appear as a curious glimpse into history. And indeed, the film footage of those years does circulate on historical television and is the crucial reference point for cultural memory of that time.

## From Atrocity Pictures to Reconstruction Films

In contrast to the imagined audience of 2048 that was expected to see the supposed archival footage as a rare curiosity, contemporary media consumers are well familiar with images from the European postwar years. And viewers today might notice quickly that one essential topic from that time is missing: *Berliner Ballade* would not ask why only so few of the hundred

4 The term “*Normalverbraucher*” (“normal consumer”) derives from ration stamps used for food rationing in postwar Germany. Similar to the American “average Joe,” the name “Otto Normalverbraucher” is used until today to describe a hypothetical personification of the statistical average German.

thousand Jews who used to live in the city would return or from where the hundreds of thousands of survivors passing through as displaced persons were coming.

If the events we now call the Holocaust have a prominent and emotionally charged place in the cultural memory of the early twenty-first century, this is also due the familiarity with images taken during the liberation of the camps as well as perpetrator footage, some of which was uncovered shortly after the war. While these (and similar) atrocity pictures are an essential part of contemporary media culture, their original appearance came as a shock. Susan Sontag, at the time twelve years old, later recalled her first encounter with photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau as “the prototypically modern revelation: a negative epiphany” (Sontag 1977, 19). These images did not only divide Sontag’s biography but also modern historical consciousness into a before and an after. In a talk show on German television, Hannah Arendt remembered the moment when the always doubted rumors about German concentration camps finally found proof: “It was really as if an abyss had opened. [...] *This ought not to have happened.* [...] This should not have happened. Something happened there to which we cannot reconcile ourselves. None of us ever can”<sup>5</sup> (Arendt 1994, 14).

Nevertheless, only a few years later these pictures disappeared from the surface of the screen. After film footage from the concentration camps had initially been used by Allied military administrations to confront the German population and then as proof in international war crimes trials, the focus soon shifted from the shocking exposure of past atrocities to mobilizing for (re)building a future. For West Germany this is perfectly illustrated by the short films produced by the US military government in Germany, OMGUS (Office of Military Government, United States), through the production company Zeit im Film, whose content, message and tone mirrored the change from a confrontative “re-education” of the former enemy in films like *Die Todesmühlen* (Death mills, dir. Hanuš Burger, DE-West, 1945) to a more collaborative “re-orientation” of a new ally in the Cold War with films such as *Ich und Mr. Marshall* (Me and Mr. Marshall, dir. Stuart Schulberg, DE-West, 1948) (Goergen 2005c). In an exculpatory way, the visual memory of concentration camps was soon conflated with other images, such as German prisoners of war (POWs) in Russian camps and communist

5 To be precise, Hannah Arendt refers to an instance in 1943 and then another one half a year later, when she and her husband heard of Auschwitz for the first time and finally got proof of its existence. If we want to understand her quote more as a cultural diagnosis than as a biographical anecdote, this moment of receiving proof would last from 1945 to 1946.

atrocities (Knoch 2001). Unlike that, some documentaries in the GDR such as *Archive sagen aus—Urlaub auf Sylt* (Archives testify—Holiday on Sylt, dir. Andrew and Annelie Thorndike, GDR, 1957) developed a specific use of archive images, including atrocity images, which placed responsibilities for past and thus also future war crimes on the ruling elites in West Germany (Steinle 2003, 135–51). Since the old capitalist and imperialist order was supposed to have been overcome in the GDR, these images also functioned as a contrast to the bright new world of socialism.

In Czechoslovakia atrocity images were used to deal with a double trauma: on the one hand, the oppression of the Nazi occupation during the war, and on the other, the Munich Conference of 1938, generally perceived as a betrayal of Czechoslovakia by the former Western allies. The reminder of the Munich Agreement and its consequences already fed into the rhetoric of celebrating the alliance with the Soviet Union. Images of the horrors of war were associated with images of key figures of Nazi domination of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. One of the films of this type was aptly titled *Nezapomeneme* (We will not forget, CZ, 1946) and its frame was footage of public prayers for the victims of the war. The camera, following the individual participants, always stopped on one of them and offered archival footage of various war crimes that was thus subjectivized as a concrete individual memory. At the time when such films were shown in cinemas, the forced expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia was taking place, and the images in question should legitimize this process.

As one of the very few French films showing atrocity images, *Les Camps de la mort* (Death camps, FR, 1945) focuses on the suffering of the victims and the brutality of the crimes, while the Germans remain absent. In France, atrocity images were not much circulated, because they attested both to the end of the war, but also to the fact that the Allies came too late for the millions of victims. Furthermore, the construction of Europe and the perception of Germany as a barrier against the communist threat from the East took precedence over the need to denounce Nazi crimes.

In Italy, the circulation of atrocity images was relatively contained even immediately after the war, and it was initially functional to a process of both national memorialization and self-victimization: images of Nazi massacres against civilians, of deportation to concentration camps, or of urban devastation supported the claim that Italy, despite initially being on the wrong side, had then actively participated from 1943 in the continental fight against Nazi–Fascist occupation, at cost of great sufferings. By the late 1940s, scenes of war destructions and sufferings appeared as starting sequences in documentaries like *Dieci anni di vita italiana* (Ten years of Italian life,

IT, 1956), and *Ieri e oggi* (Yesterday and today, dir. Giorgio Ferroni, IT, 1950) only to better emphasize the subsequent and successful reconstruction, the new positive present (and future) the nation had managed to build.

Even if the political and historical contexts were very different, this panorama shows that all European societies struggled with facing the most traumatic legacy of the war. After a moment of high visibility immediately after the war, images of the Holocaust soon became rarer and rarer, almost falling into mediatic invisibility. As a process that was politically oriented towards the Cold War and temporally oriented towards the future, reconstruction throughout Europe stood in the way of coming to terms with the past. But the memory of the Holocaust is a thread that runs through postwar European visual culture for its presence as well as for its absence—and the many strategies of denial and conflation, of exoneration and instrumentalization in between.

## Proxemics

This indicates that cinema has been one of the central places for this transformation from a society traumatized by loss to one that was looking forward to a better future. Indeed, the Allies used cinema in postwar Germany to work towards the “re-education” of the people. The American and British Allies confronted part of the German population with filmed images of the liberation of the concentration camps. As Ulrike Weckel (2012) describes it, these practices were often meant to shame the audiences—that is, to create an effect felt in front of others when one is caught violating a norm that one actually shares. Thus, she argues, the public screening of atrocity images was not so much about guilt and punishment, but was an attempt to reintegrate Germans into “civilization” by making them ashamed before the world. Nevertheless, this attempt at “re-education” through filmed images proved counterproductive and was quickly abandoned in favor of a more fruitful strategy. Germany appeared to be a promising new economic market for film exports. The Allies therefore successfully screened their respective national productions there (Fay 2008; Lovejoy 2018), although it is not known whether this was due to public enthusiasm or simply because the cinemas offered a welcome refuge in the middle of the ruins, as Laurence Thaisy (2006) argues.

In recent years, Cold War research has shifted its focus from the rivalry of the main antagonists to the intersection of interests and entanglements across the so-called Iron Curtain (e.g., Major and Mitter 2004; Vonwickel, Payk, and Lindenberger 2012; Mikkonen, Parkkinen, and Scott-Smith 2019;

Lovejoy and Pajala 2022). Thinking in terms of cross-border transfer (of technology), circulation (of both goods and works of art) and transnational networks (of communities and knowledge), these approaches highlight specific alliances and zones of contact between the (in other respects impenetrably divided) West and East. The focus on culture and media proves very productive in this sense, as it allows for a rethinking of the Cold War era not only as an information war, but as a politically framed negotiation of cultural exchange. Even in the first half of the 1950s, known for the greatest isolationism, there were platforms of exchange and circulation through which ideological and economic interests were promoted. Through the strategies of information flows of radio and later television broadcasting, cultural policies of coproduction projects, and (trans)national visions linked to international exhibitions or festivals, including film festivals, the various European states and other actors of the postwar era, created opportunities for mutual definition as well as encounter and influence. One of the important intellectual networks across Europe in the first years after the war, significantly influencing the field of cinema, was undoubtedly the network of left-wing intellectuals and, specifically, communists.

However, if the history of European cinema in the 1940s and 1950s depends on the geopolitical context and in particular on the alliances that were built and unbuilt at the beginning of the Cold War, its chronology differs from political history. It is noteworthy, for example, that the nationalization of film companies in the countries under Soviet authority was put in place before the return of real political stability (DEFA was created three years before the GDR), or on a still very fresh political basis (Czechoslovak State Film was founded the same year as the communist takeover).<sup>6</sup> In the West, new agreements aimed at relaunching transnational cinematographic exchanges as quickly as possible (in 1946, the Blum–Byrnes agreements between France and the US, then coproduction agreements between Italy and France), which in their own way contributed to creating new synergies.

This double movement is particularly interesting to highlight. On the one hand, there was the nationalization of the film industries in the East and, in Western countries, the introduction of new laws regulating cinema (in France, the creation of the CNC in 1946, a temporary aid law in 1948; in Italy, the Andreotti Law in December 1949). On the other hand, there was an

6 The nationalization of the film industry took place in Czechoslovakia in August 1945 in the form planned by the key players in the film industry during the war. The Communist Party had overseen the cinema industry since 1946 through the Ministry of Information. Czechoslovak State Film was created in 1948 as a sort of afterthought to these centralizing efforts.



increased interest in collaborating with foreign countries. The nationalized production companies of the communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe were strongly encouraged to coproduce films together to strengthen ties within the “friendly countries” and to forge common representations of the memory of the Second World War. For France or Italy, foreign collaborations were first initiated to challenge Hollywood blockbusters and to ensure that domestic production survived in the face of this competition. In both cases, it was a question of economic and technical issues (combining more financial and material resources), but also of representation and narrative (ensuring visibility and recognition outside national borders), as Paola Palma and Valérie Pozner (2019) argue. The postwar period thus corresponds to the moment when cinema contributed to the construction of national imaginations while constituting a space of encounter with foreigners and otherness. In order to better understand this double movement of national self-affirmation and confrontation with otherness, we propose here to consider cinema as a space of *proxemics* (Val 2021, 30). A neologism developed at the end of the 1960s by the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall in *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), *proxemics* refers to the study of the uses that humans make of the space that surrounds them.

Used in the fields of behavioral sciences and communication, this notion invites us to reflect on the distance that a subject maintains from his environment and how the one and the other are inter-defined. Roland Barthes in turn uses the concept of *proxemics* by applying it only to the very limited space immediately surrounding the subject (Barthes 2002, 155). According to him, *proxemics* highlights that the subject is fully inscribed in an environment; space pre-exists the subject, but it is the subject who guarantees the unity of space and establishes its limits. This concept can be transposed to the cinema, first because the film is inscribed in a national setting and stages it, and second because it is in turn received by an audience that gives it meaning. The idea of a cinematic *proxemics* thus calls for considering the film as a space of encounter between filmmakers, spectators, and national framings. It reminds us of the dimension of cinema as a space of unity with a plurality. *Proxemics* is a conceptual tool that captures the link between the universal dimension of film and its inscription in a specific sociocultural environment. In other words, it is a matter of thinking of film as the site of an encounter and articulation between national and transnational frameworks. In the postwar context, considering cinema as a space of *proxemics* shows how, in a context torn between the past of war and the incitation to “move on” while borders are changing, population displacements are massive, and the postwar period often appears as a

potential new “interwar period,” cinema does not escape these tensions but at the same time offers a “window on the world,” towards which the plural gazes of the European populations converge.

## **Non-fiction Film**

The postwar era carried a strong documentary impulse, an impulse of a new turn to reality, evident in many national cultures (and not only in films), from British social realism (Davies 2000), Italian neorealism (Pitassio 2019), Spanish neorealism and the American semi-documentary tradition (Straw 2007), in all cases broader cultural trends shaping postwar national identities. To quote Georg Lukács writing in 1948, “Never in all its history did mankind so urgently require a realist literature as it does to-day” (Lukács 1964, 18). Even in fictional cinema, this impulse did not mean a complete rejection of certain genre schemes, such as melodrama, but it nevertheless carried key aspects of a concern with “reality” or “authenticity,” notably the requirement for a complex narrative and characters not removed from their social context, as represented in the tradition of realist literature. The intensification of interest in the “documentary” aspects in cultures usually comes at stages of oversaturation and exhaustion in previous cultural patterns. It comes as a kind of critique of artificial fictional worlds divorced from the social issues of the present and carries, among other things, a commitment to the potential of art to function as a political and social agent. It is therefore both understandable and surprising that most of the existing literature on postwar European cinema has focused on trends in fictional film or the birth of new film industries, as the example of DEFA in East Germany shows (Heiduschke 2013), but has generally neglected documentary and non-fiction film.

When we speak of non-fiction film in this book, we mean a wide range of forms, from newsreels to documentaries to educational films to amateur films. These films are, however, more specific in their position in film culture, their task and mission, or their modes of exhibition and reception, than in their absence of elements of fiction. Although most of the films we have discussed could be described as documentary or reportage, those with a predominantly educational or promotional purpose are often characterized by a hybrid form using staging or animation alongside non-fiction footage. Although not exclusively, these films were often funded by supra-national organizations (Marshall Plan, UNESCO, UN, etc.) or by national governments, corporate entities, or interest groups. As such, they became part of the constellation of persuasive media, for which Lee Grieveson,

in a Foucauldian reference, emphasizes the aspect of “governmentality” (Grieveson 2009). These films were involved in the information campaigns of the aforementioned institutions and as such participated in directing the actions, thinking, imagination, and emotional experience of society. As media of largely realist representation, they were thus wedged in the paradox of mixing modes of authenticity and normativity. On the one hand, these films provided authentic footage of postwar reconstruction and, on the other hand, they were often used to discipline the audience’s attention and frame its beliefs and expectations.

Even if this kind of film is not specific to the postwar period, since the development of documentary film in general in the 1930s was, as Zoë Druick puts it, very much a “state project” worldwide (Druick 2007), it can be argued that it was after the Second World War that its importance was newly strengthened. In many ways, postwar non-fiction film drew on the continuity of 1930s social documentary and wartime instructional films, that, according to Will Straw (2007), “took shape in the interweaving of official, institutional voices and emerging systems of expert knowledge,” and strived for civic enlightenment. Yet the postwar interest in the functional or promotional role of films was fostered by the ethos of liberation and the consensus on the socially formative meaning of film amongst both ruling elites and filmmakers. The framework of this consensus was a shared interest in rapid and effective postwar reconstruction. However different the perceptions of the course and outcomes of the reconstruction process may have been between the various actors, the role of audiovisual media in it was seen as crucial. A complicating factor in this enhanced persuasive and mobilizing role of audiovisual culture in the late 1940s was the audience’s experience of the massive Nazi propaganda during the Second World War. Postwar non-fiction film thus defended its position as a useful communication tool: on the one hand, in a situation where a large number of people were looking for their new roles in the postwar societies, and to a large extent expected some kind of guidance; on the other hand, also at a time of persistent distrust of propaganda messages.

Amateur film culture occupied a specific place in this context, providing immediate insight into the private life and intimate experience of contemporary society. Often considered one of the possible sources of writing history from below, the amateur film gives voice to social communities usually neglected by the official media, to gendered, ethnically, racially, or otherwise disadvantaged and marginalized groups. In its home-movie form it provides insight into the everyday life of ordinary people, typically through the perspective of family celebrations, parties, or travel—and, as

such, it is both specific and typical (Forgács 2008). Since it shows the most often ritualized family carefree-ness, it simultaneously makes visible what is usually absent in official production and also renders invisible the negative aspects of everyday life (such as quarrels or violence). While remaining aware of this ambiguity and of the specific importance of home movies and amateur films for the communities in which they were made, it is also necessary to see their role as a historical source of knowledge of the past (Odin 2008). As a family memory and as a memory of a certain historical epoch, however, these films carry completely different layers of meaning.

Non-fiction films are characterized by their ephemeral nature—they are consumed less as entertainment and more as magazine and newspaper articles and do not create substantial memory traces. It is a type of communication from which the viewer does not take specific insights or appeals directly but composes them into a particular framework of understanding the world, discussing and shaping her/his values and beliefs through them. So that these messages reach the viewer frequently and regularly, the first decade after World War II was marked by increased efforts to develop a wide network of theatrical and nontheatrical modes of non-fiction film exhibition. Thus, these films were to reach audiences in a variety of situations and environments and together shape their public knowledge.

International relations in the field of non-fiction film also developed hand in hand with postwar efforts to restore and in some sectors to strengthen broken international ties. New agencies were created to exchange material between national newsreel units, an international festival culture developed, including amateur and specialized in documentary or short films (Leipzig [Moine 2018], Oberhausen), and international associations were founded (e.g., World Documentary Union) (Lovejoy 2022). Documentary films played their cultural diplomatic role through screenings at embassies, industrial films presented companies at industrial fairs, and contacts in the scientific and educational film community expanded. Despite the fact that the development of this integration process was soon disrupted by new geopolitical conflicts and wars, it was possible to build on its foundations to a limited extent, even in the separate spheres of influence on both sides of the so-called Iron Curtain.

## Visual Culture

Non-fiction cinema did not operate in isolation; it was instead tied to other media representations and practices that deeply structured postwar visual

culture. In these visual and media networks, it established connections, parallels, and tensions with its counterpart, fiction cinema, as well as with photography and the press, illustrated magazines and photojournalism; museum exhibitions; the advertisement industry, posters, and postcards; the emerging television. In the immediate postwar time, however, non-fiction cinema—namely, newsreels and short documentaries—remained one of the cornerstones of these multimedia networks and visual constellations shaping the new Europe. While radio was purely acoustic and press photographs lacked movement and immediacy, cinema provided what seemed to be the most lively and trustworthy documentation of events, situations, public figures, social and political issues.

Within this media configuration, a shared and highly recognizable visual language developed based on the forms and staples of the international humanitarian documentary (Druick 2008), the prewar newsreel and the journalistic photoreportage. This iconographic common language made of icons, tropes, patterns, and narratives deployed in countless documentaries, this sort of visual documentarian *koiné* contributed to set the “visible” of the era: what was considered, by both image-makers and the audiences, worthy of representation and what instead was relegated outside of the accepted field of visibility. Considering the varying degree between the extremes of full visibility and total invisibility, it is possible to draw a “hierarchy of visibility” based on the cultural acceptability and need of representations. Defined by the moral, political, and social codes of a period, the visible is only partly consciously constructed, while partly it gathers issues, tensions, and tendencies that run unawares through its time. As Pierre Sorlin has argued,

the “filmable” changes according to moral or intellectual criteria often external to cinema. The cinematographic work registers objective facts, but not in complete autonomy, as it obeys to the variations of sensitivity and to the curiosity of those filming and of the audience. Inevitably, worries and fears of an era influence first the selection of objects to film, and then how these things or situations are filmed. (Sorlin 2013a, 139)

As a peculiar historical source, the visible can reveal the implicit undertones of the images, since they reflect social processes, political transformations, ideological discourses, moral issues, anthropological changes, capturing what is not explicitly expressed. In other words, analyzing the visible of a specific time is essential to cast light on its collective mentality, the hardest yet the most interesting dimension of the past to grasp in order to understand it (Braudel 1958). With its standardized forms and industrialized production,

mostly reiterative in messages and conservative in aesthetic forms, with a lower degree of authoriality and subjectivity than fiction film (except for some cases), aimed at mass consumption and education, non-fiction film proves to be essential to investigate postwar visual culture. But how to approach something potentially vague and all-inclusive like “the visible”? Our proposal is to pinpoint and examine some of its recurring visual elements, or iconemes.

Some sixty years ago, the term “iconeme” (strongly related to the tradition of iconographic studies in art history) was introduced in film semiotic to indicate a clearly distinguishable unit of images capable of representing a specific situation, recognizable by the spectator (Casetti 1993, 146). Geographer Eugenio Turri developed this notion in relation to rural and urban landscapes and their representations: iconemes are “those elementary units of perception, those *pictures*” we use to build up our collective image of a place, a region, a nation. Culturally determined, they function by repetition and accumulation, according to a principle of “variation through continuity” that often structures the processes of image reiteration, from Renaissance frescos to Hollywood genres, from photographic portraiture to newsreel production. Always related “as parts of a system,” iconemes activate “psychological and representational mechanisms tied with our historical, social, geographical, economical, etc. comprehension and knowledge” (Turri 2014, 148). Being a sort of abstract matrix, the iconeme exceeds the single image, as it creates and perpetuates a coherent iconic constellation spanning media and contexts.

Moving from a purely semiotic to a wider approach that repositions this useful notion within historical and cultural frames of analysis, the iconeme reveals at least three major features. First, it is transmedial, since the same iconeme can be found in films, magazines, advertisement, photography, and the visual arts, highlighting the unity and synergy of media strategies. Second, it is transnational, circulating across borders and national contexts. Although differently interpreted according to local, regional, or national contexts of production and reception, iconemes prove the existence of a shared pan-European visual culture going even beyond divisions often considered as insurmountable. The iconeme of the “factory” as a place of work, labor, production, workers’ rights or oppression, economic rebirth, etc. was depicted differently in Western or Eastern Europe, in each country according to national ideologies and sensitivity, even in each single film, stressing one or the other of the many traits it can bear. Still, “the factory” remains one of the most pervasive icons of postwar European cinema. Without diminishing the relevance of specific interpretations, it is relevant

to acknowledge this transnationality of the iconemes, traveling iconic units of communication, each time more or less recontextualized and adapted, yet always clearly recognizable through a set of basic features. It seems logical to call for a transnational approach for them. Focusing on the European dimension of this shared visual culture is an attempt and an invitation to overcome the usually monolithic, non-dialogic national narratives and memories promoted in public discourses (Assmann 2011, 54), as well as a certain “methodological nationalism” (De Cesari and Rigney 2014) affecting academic disciplines, in favor of cross-national perspectives that articulate issues of symbolic and material circulation of images, media, people, goods, and ideas. Lastly, iconemes and their relevance can be considered trans-historical, often extending over long periods of time, allowing for a diachronic comparison with previous and subsequent periods, opening to a cultural history of visual tropes and visibility.

Some of the recurring iconic tropes of postwar non-fiction cinema are thoroughly examined in the following essays: the already mentioned “factory” and its workers as the place for forging economic wealth and social equanimity; the “frontier” dividing Europe’s space on multiple levels; the “war ruins,” endlessly repeated as if in a visual elaboration of the collective trauma and mourning; the “house” in both its public and private dimensions, as an urgent political problem, as individual aspiration, as place of intimacy and family, but also of clearly divided gender roles. Many other tropes could be listed, including cinema itself (in the form of movie theaters, film studios, film festivals, glamorous film stars, amateur practice, etc.) as self-reflexive icons revealing the central role they had in that society. Unsurprisingly, many of these iconemes coincide with real public spaces—the factory, the border, the square, the movie theater, etc.—showing how publicness was both spatially and visually constructed, and invested with cultural meanings.

Creating a unified and unifying visual culture, iconemes played an important role in shaping postwar societies, as well as in building their future visual memories. These iconographic tropes and configurations actively participate in the “pluri-medial networks” responsible for constructing, modifying, or maintaining cultural memories, gathering them around powerful images and symbols. As Astrid Erll argues, “cultural memory is unthinkable without media” (Erll 2011, 113), as it is through media that narratives, patterns, and icons are created and passed down to future generations. Iconemes are therefore not only units of visibility circulating and acting in a specific time, they also constitute the visual elements of the subsequent shared memory of that period. They exert a synchronic agency towards their contemporary contexts, and a diachronic agency that

influences forms and practices of memory in the following decades. The role that non-fiction films and their images have had in building and reinforcing national communities and identities is undeniable. One could think of the often underestimated relevance of newsreels in different countries (Imesch, Schade, and Sieber 2016; Sainati 2001). Seen through a wider lens, however, these films and iconemes unfold cross-border narratives and memories of the postwar decade, which can be framed beyond national schemes of reception and analysis.

Lastly, iconemes must not be understood as fixed, rigid schemes of interpretation that limit the possibilities of images to signify and create meanings. As much as they can be culturally, politically, or ideologically determined with accuracy, images always retain a degree of polysemy, an instability in meaning allowing alternative readings or countergazes. The iconemes comply with two aspects inherently tied to images. Alongside the *figurative*, that is, the explicit, dominant, easily assignable and understandable message conveyed through the shots, the montage, and the sound, the *figural* can always hint behind the surface. Recalling the seminal notion by Jean-François Lyotard, the figural can disrupt the homogeneity of the assigned meaning, the *figure* can disturb the *discourse* through details and tensions rising from the inexhaustible complexity of the image. Even where everything seems set and clear (a feeling often experienced while watching postwar newsreels and documentaries, with their assertive tone and straight-to-the-point rhetoric), images maintain the potential to crack the surface and call for our gaze to see something more, to grasp something “beyond,” something hinting at what remained out of the frame, in the field of cinematic invisibility.

Many perspectives, indeed, were ignored by the film camera, many spaces remained scarcely represented if not completely invisible in cinema, even when they were part of everyday life in postwar Europe: Black markets, queer spaces, female agency, Jewish trauma and Holocaust representation, anti-colonial subjectivity—to name just a few aspects that, fallen into the shadow of images and scarcely visible in our cultural memory of that time, challenge us to look further for their traces in the archives and in the films.

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The volume is divided into four sections, each bringing together contributions from and about different countries. Transnational perspectives are not only developed theoretically, but many texts have also been produced in cross-border collaboration. For this, we have invited both established and well-known experts as well as young scholars whose contributions stand



alongside the research presented by the ViCTOR-E project team. While each section has its own brief introduction summarizing the individual contributions, here we will only give a general overview of the book's structure.

The first section, "Locating Non-fiction Film," introduces the primary object of research, non-fiction film. However, it is not defined primarily by its textual qualities or its reference to reality, but rather by its location in specific contexts of production, exhibition, and reception in postwar Europe. The second section, "Reconstructing Realities," is devoted to various case studies that examine how non-fiction films have made an active contribution in different fields of the political, architectural, and cultural reconstruction and can thus be considered social agents of reconstruction, in transnational as well as in local perspectives. The third section, "Spaces of Cultural Trauma," discusses how and where in the rebuilt and reorganized world its violent past could be represented—or, if not, where it left its marks and traces anyways. The fourth and last section, "Creating New Paths," looks at actual and potential contemporary uses of archival footage in the context of digital and online media.

This volume is far from being exhaustive, and we hope this motivates further research. If we found out one thing over the course of the ViCTOR-E project, then this is how strongly many of these images from the past resonated with current issues and crises, whether bombed cities in Syria or in Ukraine. While the last remains of the postwar world order are going under, we think it is not the worst idea to work through this past, to better understand where we are now.

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# Section 1

Locating Non-fiction Film



It is hardly possible to give a general definition, or just a comprehensive description, of what non-fiction film is. Even the definitional negation—that these films are not fictional—can be questioned, as many documentaries, especially in the postwar period, contain staged scenes as a matter of course. During this period, various traditions and schools of documentarism crossed paths in Europe, overlapped, and were mixed into each other, new forms of production emerged, and the expectations of the medium changed. Industries that had been built into propaganda machines during the war were transformed to produce films for peace (and a Cold War), government regulations (such as the Andreotti Law in Italy) turned short film production into a lucrative business, newsreels used internationally circulating footage to report from around the world, and amateur film culture was on the rise.

If it is difficult to define non-fiction film without cutting out its more ephemeral forms and thereby large parts of film history. One answer to this problem is the concept of useful cinema (cf. Elsaesser 2009; Wasson and Acland 2011). In short, it replaces questions of textual qualities and the extra-textual references of documentaries with the question of the purposes and uses of non-fiction film. In a variation of this approach, we can also ask: *Where* is non-fiction film? It is evident that the places and spaces of different forms of non-fiction films differ widely, but also that they can hardly be pinned down to one place or space alone. Is the place of a film where it was shot, the cinematic space it creates, or rather the cinema where it is screened? Or, for that matter, the school, the company, or the village tavern visited by a mobile cinema truck? Is film production bound to the political and legal frameworks of the nation state? To what extent are these transcended by the logics of technical innovation and economic exploitation? Or even by political visions and ideologies of international understanding, cooperation, or solidarity?

Focusing on two different forms, the documentary and the newsreel, Jeanpaul Goergen and Kay Hoffmann provide a comprehensive overview of the production of non-fiction film in postwar Germany, looking at its technical, structural, and political conditions in the two German states. The parallels and differences in the development of documentary film in a country divided between East and West points to different developments in the two power blocs as well as national continuities. Lucie Česálková succeeds in her text, despite a general lack of sources and, among other things, on the basis of oral history interviews, to carve out essential characteristics of the audience of non-fiction films. With the non-stop cinema, she focuses on a very specific space of film consumption, which can also be seen as an exemplary type of non-fiction film reception for the time.



Following the recent discoveries in American archives, Regina M. Longo takes a closer look at a series of short documentaries produced by an Italian newsreel company and portraying different regions of the country. The author traces a complex web of different positions and projections inscribed in the films, their production and distribution, and their archival history, through which postwar Italy is localized between regionalism, nationalism, and the American model. Marsha Siefert discusses a genre of coproduced documentaries that were realized under Soviet leadership in various countries that later became part of the Eastern Bloc. Reporting in a formulaic manner on liberation, reconstruction, and socialist construction, these films served both as vehicles of Sovietization and as a form of cultural diplomacy. Matthias Steinle and Perrine Val focus on Franco-German relations, which have been marked by a history of devastating wars and constant border conflicts but are now at the core of Western Europe's political integration. Based on a French corpus, the authors show how non-fiction films served as instruments to transform historically evolved images of the enemy into images of a new friendship.

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# 1. *Itinerari Italiani*: A Visual Information Campaign to Reclaim Italian Regionalisms and Remap US–Italian Economic Interdependence under the Marshall Plan

*Regina M. Longo*

## Abstract

This chapter traces the interwoven Italian and US production histories of a series of short documentaries that resurfaced in the US National Archives in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They were produced under the Italian newsreel label *La settimana Incom* between 1949 and 1951 with entirely Italian production teams. The pro-American *Incom* newsreel series was known for recycling its own footage and using stock footage provided to them by US government and commercial newsreel producers. Through close textual analysis of the series, the author takes the reader on a reimagined post-WWII grand tour of Italy, stopping in each location to address the competing imaginaries and tensions that emerge where distinct cultural and political agendas are at stake.

**Keywords:** propaganda, information film, postwar Italian film, public diplomacy, Cold War

A series of short documentary films promoting Italian culture and industry called *Itinerari Italiani* (Italian Itineraries) was created and distributed by Istituto Luce (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa) under the newsreel label *La settimana Incom* from *Incom* (Industria Cortometraggi Milano) between 1949 and 1951. These films remained in circulation well into the 1950s. They were produced by various directors in Luce's stable of informational and short

film specialists, but the main concept for the series was the work of Vittorio Gallo, the *Giornale Luce* veteran who also directed several ECA (Economic Cooperation Administration aka the Marshall Plan) productions during this period. In the immediate aftermath of World War II Europe remained in ruins. US politicians and diplomats concurred that such dire economic conditions left Europe susceptible to internal and external exploitation by the Soviet Union and other communist countries. Fear of communist expansion was at an all-time high in the US Congress when in June 1947, the US secretary of state, George C. Marshall, delivered a speech to Harvard University's graduating class in which he called for a comprehensive plan to rebuild Europe. In March 1948 Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act (ECA) and approved funding that eventually topped \$12 billion by 1952 to rebuild Western Europe. In a nod to the secretary, this aid package was commonly referred to as the "Marshall Plan."

The Italian films simply bear the title of the region on which they focused. The series includes the following titles: *Venezia*, *Isole della Laguna*, *Liguria*, *Lombardia*, *Emilia*, *Toscana*, *Umbria*, *Lazio*, *Campania*, *Apulia*, *Calabria*, *Sicilia*, and *Sardegna*. Each episode featured the popular radio personality Silvio Gigli as the viewer's guide through the diverse regions and provinces of Italy. Evidence from the ECA program report to the US Congress from July 1950 indicates that these short subjects were shown in Italian theaters alongside a series of official Marshall Plan (MP) documentaries produced between 1949 and 1951 that focused on successful MP-funded land reclamation projects underway in Italy since 1948. These titles included *Land Redeemed* (Telefilm Rome for ECA Italy, 1950), *The Appian Way* (dir. Vittorio Gallo for Europa Telefilm for ECA, 1949–50), and *Village without Words* (David Kurland Productions Rome for ECA Italy, 1950) (ECA Paris 1950). The report claims that the newsreel was the most important type of film that ECA produced and distributed, but that the theatrical venue was not the only form of exhibition for these titles:

All footage does double duty. Once regular newsreel distribution has been completed, the separate items are assembled into a monthly film digest of recovery activities, dubbed into various languages, and made available to the USIS, several ECA country missions and other noncommercial distributors.

La settimana Incom newsreels were known for recycling their own footage and using stock footage provided by the US government and commercial newsreel producers. However, in addition to the recycling of footage I have

located another appearance of Gigli in La settimana Incom newsreel *Botta e risposta nelle scuole* (Question and answer in the classroom) from March 21, 1951.<sup>7</sup> In this short made only for distribution in Italy, elementary school children in Frosinone are taking their oral exams with the *Itinerari* series narrator Silvio Gigli, in much the same way that they do in the *Itinerari* episode *Lombardia*. Rather than being a case of copying an American formula, this newsreel suggests to me that many of the creative choices and conceits of the MP-funded Italian films were DOC (Denominazione di origine controllata), aka “Made in Italy” (ECA Paris 1950).<sup>8</sup>

The map of Italy is divided first into regions, then into provinces, and finally into municipalities. The number of provinces and municipalities in Italy has fluctuated greatly throughout history, but Italy’s regions have remained constant. They are its largest political and cultural classifications. During the Kingdom of Italy, these regional divisions served simply to divide administrative districts that were still centrally controlled by the state. The regions were granted political autonomy in 1948 by the Constitution of the Italian Republic, but this remained mostly a political gesture on the part of the ruling Christian Democrats (DC) to try to appease local politicians and maintain their national parliamentary power over the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI, Italian Communist Party) strongholds of Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, and Marche. It was not until 1970 that Italy held its first regional elections in which all twenty regions exercised their individual voting rights, carrying with them greater financial autonomy as all regions voted for a greater percentage of their levied taxes to remain within regional coffers. The repercussions of this financial inequality had immediate consequences in the early period of recovery, which are highlighted in the *Itinerari* films.

The Incom producers’ decision to create a domestic travelogue series based mainly on the regions, rather than the provinces or cities of Italy, is significant. It points to an attempt on the part of Italians themselves to move beyond more traditional local and provincial political divisions and to aggregate them within a newer regional structure that was just taking shape under De Gasperi and that strategically sought a cultural, rather than political rationale for its formation. Keeping in mind the evidence that La settimana Incom newsreels were jointly distributed by the USIS

7 This film can be viewed on Istituto Luce’s YouTube channel: [https://youtu.be/OTkG\\_Nc9zPA](https://youtu.be/OTkG_Nc9zPA).

8 *Denominazione di origine controllata* (controlled and guaranteed designation of origin). A term coined by the Italian Agricultural Ministry in the early 1950s. Similar to the French *Appellation d’origine contrôlée* (AOC).

and by the Centro Cinematografico Incom internationally, and that many Incom images would therefore be recycled in other commercial and state-sponsored newsreel productions, the reinforcement of regional identities in postwar Italy seems to be yet another anachronistic act on the part of the state-sponsored film industry that reinterpreted an older form of regionalism in Italy to reconstitute a form of Italian nationalism in the wake of the failed Fascist experiments with unification. The *Itinerari Italiani* films seem to be one of Incom's earliest attempts to redraw Italy, with each regional segment representing at once distinct regional charms and the whole of Italy, a metonymic and mimetic approach that Incom would employ frequently, and one which echoed throughout Marcellini's *Italia e il mondo* (dir. Romolo Marcellini, Incom, IT, 1953) that received widespread international distribution.

Several strong themes emerge in the *Itinerari* films: the devastation of Italian infrastructure by pre-existing conditions of poverty and the ravages of war, the willingness of the Italian government to go along with MP redevelopment initiatives, the desire of the Italians for greater physical and economic mobility brought about by the promise of greater industrial productivity, and the recognition of reassuring origins and historical foundations for the *civiltà italica* (Italian civilization), which allows for the redemption of an Italian historic imaginary.

It is curious that these itinerary films resurfaced in the archives at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), rather than in the Luce archives or in the United States Information Service (USIS) Trieste Collection, which contains a great number of Luce and Incom titles, and which is now housed at the Italian Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS, Central State Archive) in Rome. I make note of their location for two reasons. The first is the fact that to date only Italian-language versions of this series have surfaced. The second is that while the Incom newsreels received US government funding, it was not through the European Recovery Plan (ERP) budget. Rather, Incom received funds from another US State Department coffer. Gian Piero Brunetta has documented and outlined these transactions in his research. Brunetta notes that shortly after Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi signed the Peace Treaty with the Allies, pushed through the treaty's ratification by Parliament in September 1947, and enacted the new Italian constitution in January 1948, Incom's founder, Sandro Pallavicini, showed up at the US State Department offices in Rome to claim the rewards that American diplomats had promised him. The American ambassador to Italy, James Clement Dunn, penned a letter to the State Department on April 27, 1948, urging the United States not only to continue to regularly fund the

work of Incom, but to increase its funding of Pallavicini's pro-American newsreel series (Brunetta, 1993).

The films' archival location points to the interwoven agendas of the US and Italian governments in creating a new Italian postwar identity that would blend the inherent regionalism of the peninsula into an idealized Italian national identity by mapping it onto an American model of participatory democracy rooted in economic interdependence rather than economic regionalism. The MP films, both in retrospect and at the time of their initial release, can be viewed as a model or rhetorical device for exhorting the planned intervention and redevelopment according to a specific paradigm of shared economic goals. By choosing to fund the work of Pallavicini's Incom series with funds that did not come from the MP coffers, the US government forged links with private film producers in Italy that would persist beyond the MP years. For this reason, I insist that the *Itinerari* series are MP films, and it is important to extend the definition of what constitutes an MP film. The decision to fund these films came about at the same moment that the Marshall Plan Information Unit was created, and it served to reinforce the political and economic messages that the short films that were officially stamped with "ERP" served. It is my hunch, borne out in the archival records, that US State Department officials in Washington, DC, and in Rome viewed all these *Itinerari* films quite closely and this is the reason why many of the films are now in the US National Archives, as they were part of the official records of the State Department on their activities in Italy. Other historians, however, do not share this view. David Ellwood, who has written extensively on the Cold War in Europe and on the MP films in Italy, insists that the criteria for defining an MP film should remain based on clearly delineated budget lines for ERP funding. I find this classification far too restrictive, considering the far-reaching aims of the US in postwar Italy. While the US government record and US government officials necessarily need to adhere to this classification, as a cultural historian I seek both to acknowledge and challenge the official record. I believe this allows for a more thorough investigation of the mechanisms of soft power working through the cinematic apparatus (Ellwood 1999).

The US government was therefore not only "covertly" funding the films' production during the MP years but also assisting in their distribution to Italian-speaking audiences beyond the peninsula. The *Itinerari* series films are cataloged in the September 1, 1952, publication *Catalogue of Documentary Films*, issued by the Mutual Security Agency (MSA), the successor to the Marshall Plan, and published by the US Printing Office. This catalog was available via consular services to USIS offices around the world. The films

are listed in alphabetical order alongside all the official Marshall Plan Italian films. The *Itinerari* films leave room for interpretation thanks in no small part to the perspective that an Italian production crew could provide. However, I believe that viewing them alongside even the most heavy-handed and jingoistic of the MP films, such as Vittorio Gallo's *Appian Way* (1950) and *Land Redeemed* (1950)—which tout US foreign policy and credit MP aid as the driving force behind all recovery work underway in Italy, going so far as to highlight American military casualties on behalf of Italy during WWII (*Appian Way*)—shows the *Itinerari* films to be even more significant tools of the MP Information Unit's agenda in Italy. Regardless of the fact that Gallo (and his uncredited collaborator, Romolo Marcellini) seemed content to sell themselves to the highest bidder (the US government), their positions as insiders who fundamentally identified as Italian, and who were personally and commercially invested in the continued growth of the Italian postwar film industry on their own terms, allowed for a more nuanced Italian itinerary to emerge in the official ECA productions as well as in the US-funded Incom productions. Therefore, despite US diplomatic efforts to imagine and project a peaceful new Italy, built on the ashes and ruins of the old country, coercion through visual information campaigns would prove more difficult to develop and maintain, notwithstanding the rhetoric of indebtedness that the MP films delivered to hundreds of thousands of Italian viewers at home and in the diaspora.

More recent publications on the MP films, such as Maria Fritsche's *The American Marshall Plan Film Campaign and the Europeans: A Captivated Audience?* (2018), move ever closer to this more expansive definition of an MP film. Fritsche's thorough outline of funding and production practices across several MP countries demonstrates that the Italian MP film unit maintained more autonomy than all other European regional offices, and that it already had a head start with building its production unit in Rome before the main MP film unit office was set up in Paris. In some ways, the Italian MP unit served as a model for the Paris headquarter (HQ), and not vice versa. Fritsche also demonstrates that the prolific output and sophistication of the Italian MP film unit relied not only on eager, well-connected State Department officials in Rome, but more importantly on the entrenched structure of the US's WWII propaganda apparatus in Italy that aided in ousting the Italian Communist Party and bringing De Gasperi and the Christian Democrats to power. She states,

During liberation, the US army had occupied the famous film studio Cinecittà and engaged Italian filmmakers to produce information films

for the Allied Control Commission. In addition, the State Department's US Information Service (USIS) had opened libraries and reading rooms that ran cultural programs and organized film screenings. In the run-up to the Italian government elections in April 1948. (Fritsche 2018, 55)

Perhaps more important for the argument that I am making here, Fritsche cites official US State Department communications that express concern over the autonomy of the Italian MP film unit. Having already produced twelve films before the Paris HQ opened in 1949, Fritsche notes:

Wally Nielsen, deputy head of the Information Division in Paris, found "nothing but pleasant surprises" during his visit to Rome in spring 1949, though he was slightly uncomfortable with the information unit's strong autonomy, and with "the slight tendency in Italy to view the Paris Information Office more with tolerance than dependence." But, since the Italian information office continued to impress the headquarters in Paris, it retained a high degree of autonomy throughout the operation. (Fritsche 2018, 55)

As the Italian MP unit forged ahead with films focusing on the renewal of industry, agriculture, and infrastructure throughout Italy, it also set its sights on producing MP films for the Trieste and Greece units. But Fritsche stops short of designating any films that did not bear the mark of ERP in the opening or closing credits as MP films.

In my estimation, Incom newsreels were an integral part of the MP visual information campaign, and the *Itinerari* films demonstrate the degree of autonomy with which the Italian producers could operate, thanks in part to additional funding from another pot of US State Department funds. Incom produced a total of 2,555 newsreels, totaling over 350 hours of film, which reached every Italian movie house in the immediate postwar era; the ECA wanted to be sure to capitalize on this opportunity to reach as many Italians as possible. In the same ECA report to Congress cited above, ECA officials acknowledged that

The powerful medium of motion pictures, because of the complex technical problems of both production and distribution, is one of the most difficult to employ as part of a short-term information effort. However, most of the serious bottlenecks have now been broken. Cooperative production and distribution arrangements with the USIS, participating governments and private commercial organizations have substantially been completed. (ECA Paris 1950)



Italy was one of the first countries to achieve the ECA's ideal form of "cooperative production." Keeping in mind the pattern of ongoing displacement of the material record of the Marshall Plan films that I have identified in my research, it bears noting that the only *Itinerari* title that is currently accessible through the archives of Luce, and that is unique to the archives, is a one-and-a-half-minute segment of *Itinerari Italiani: Isole della Laguna* (Incom, no. 237, January 1949). The name "Isole della Laguna" designates an area in the Veneto region that includes the city of Venice but that also includes the surrounding islands and lagoons; viewing the title credits that appear on the clip available online through the portal of Luce's archives, it is evident that this is a distinct title from the *Itinerari* appointment *Venezia*, which is part of the NARA collection and which centers on the city of Venice itself. No director is mentioned for *Isole della Laguna* on the print or in the Luce archives, where the film clip is classified as an "itinerario turistico [travelogue]." Interestingly, two more Incom *Itinerari* travelogues exist at Luce. They are not "Italian" itineraries, but rather *Strapaese* (Longo 2012).

The term "*Strapaese*" does not translate easily into English. It is a political term as much as it is a descriptive term. The term came to be closely associated with the "Selvaggio" ("Wild") movement that was an offshoot of the Futurist movement and then began to take greater shape as a distinct philosophy and way of life among artists and intellectuals in Tuscany during the late Fascist era. It was led by art historian and critic Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and graphic designer Mino Maccari, who coined the term "*Strapaese*" (literal translation: "ultra-village," a place which can be construed as outside or beyond the limits of the country), which "refers both to an imaginary Italian rural never-never land and to a loose association or league (*lega*) of rebellious, anti-bourgeois, elitist nonconformists, most of whom were university graduates" (Abramowicz 2004, 117).

Maccari located *Strapaese* "a little below Florence, a little above Siena—it doesn't appear on any map, but that won't bother us, we'll make room for it. *Strapaese* has its own way of life. [If] the cities don't want us, [if] the countryside is being destroyed, [...] we'll create a country just for people like us and to spite those in large cities [...] we'll call it [our own country]—*Strapaese*." The *Strapaesani* (the inhabitants of "our own country") were loyal to what they understood to be the original morality and integrity of Fascism. They were opposed to "certain actions and policies of the Fascist regime: the centralization of power in Rome and the kind of mass culture that Mussolini was imposing on the country in an effort to achieve 'unanimity' and modernize Italy" (Abramowicz 2004, 120).

While the original *Strapaesani* were in Tuscany, the two existing Incom newsreels labeled *Strapaese* feature regions of Italy that are further south of Florence and closer to Rome. *Domenica a Capracotta* (Sunday in Capracotta, Incom, no. 357, 1949) features the region of Molise. *Strapaese a Pofi* (Our own country in Pofi, Incom, no. 489, 1950) features the region of Ciociaria, which is the ancient name for the contemporary province of Frosinone (the name was reinvigorated by inhabitants of Frosinone during the height of the Fascist regime), located in Lazio, the same region that contains Rome. Both these newsreels, like the *Itinerari Italiani*, feature images of folk festivals and rural populations. In contrast to the *Itinerari Italiani*, they are much shorter in length, and they do not feature any images of MP-funded reconstruction or postwar industrialization. In this way, Incom's producers located these towns outside of the imaginary of the contemporary Italy that they wished to share with the world, and they reappropriated the outsider-Fascist label to identify specific areas within the geographical confines of postwar Italy that did not willingly adopt the joint US and Italian government initiatives to develop a liberal, democratic, industrialized Italy. If Capracotta and Pofi remain "wild, never-never lands" and openly promote folkloric traditions that acknowledge and reinforce their links to a Fascist rather than an Italian past, they will "not appear on any map" of contemporary Italy as represented in the *Itinerari Italiani* films.

The USIS Trieste Collection of 506 film titles holds only a single *Itinerari* film—*Campania*. *Campania* is also part of the NARA holdings. The fact that the *Itinerari* films were located at NARA in Record Group (RG) 306 with all the ECA mission files indicates that these materials were indeed viewed by ECA and State Department officials at the time of their creation. Based on my earlier publication on the MP films in Italy, already cited in this chapter, that links the work of ECA, Luce, and Incom, I would venture to say that this series was indeed a joint Italian–US governmental effort to reframe Italian national identity by addressing the problems and the "charms" of Italy's entrenched regionalism, as a means to promote Italian tourism in Italy at the same moment that the US was engaged in the Cold War project of encouraging Americans to return to the great capitals of Western Europe as tourists and to simultaneously become tourists in their own country. There is even a *La settimana Incom* newsreel that features a middle-class American family vacationing in Hawaii to reinforce this concept of tourism at home to Italians (No. 395, January 26, 1950). Ironically, in 1950 Hawaii was still "*Strapaese*" for the US; it had been a US territory since 1900, but it did not become a state until 1959. An underlying goal of cultural homogeneity that would make the exotic or seemingly backward

areas of the US and Italy more familiar to most the countries' upwardly mobile inhabitants is embedded in this practice of tourism at home. Thus, when historian David Ellwood described this project of the selling of the Marshall Plan to Europeans with the tagline "You too can be like us," he might well have added: We (Americans) too could be like them (Italians) and find exotic and untamed regions within our own countries (Ellwood 2003).

### **Italy Remapped: Redefining and Renegotiating Regionalism in the Travelogue Newsreel**

While I have located thirteen episodes in the *Itinerari Italiani* series—two of which feature the region known as Veneto (the region that includes and surrounds Venice), one *Strapaese* short that focuses on an area within the larger region of Molise for which no separate *Itinerari* film has been located, and one *Strapaese* episode that features a rogue village in the region of Lazio just a few short kilometers from Italy's capital (Rome)—the Luce archives do not indicate whether there were more *Itinerari* films produced to represent all the regions of Italy. At the time of this series's creation there were twenty politically recognized regions in Italy (and these twenty regions still exist today), therefore films from six regions potentially remain "missing."

Viewing the *Itinerari Italiani* episodes as a series, interesting tensions also emerge that acknowledge the persistence of regionalism across Italy. The *Itinerari* films reflect the US and Italian governments' attempts to both exploit and contain these cultural trends for political and economic gain. These tensions are simultaneously smoothed over by the uniform aesthetics of the travel film genre and critiqued through a comedic inflection of this genre that further meshes with certain elements of the Incom newsreel genre and allows the films to function as a curious blend of ethnographic film, educational documentary, entertainment, and social commentary. On the surface, the *Itinerari* films seem to fit together effortlessly thanks to the presence of recurring series narrator Silvio Gigli. The films, whether viewed as a group or individually, are superficially successful in deemphasizing regional styles, which inherently serve as markers of regional identity.

What emerges in their place is a surface aesthetic that locates the Italian-ness within each region (as opposed, for example, to a Venetian-ness, Tuscan-ness, Sicilian-ness), thus encouraging the Italian audience to map a US model of statehood on to their (usually) clannish peninsula. This smoothing over of regional and cultural distinctions and tensions

that persisted in Italy is a strong indicator of the influence of the Marshall Planners in the creation of these (Italian) *Itinerari*. Yet, Gigli—the comedian-cum-trickster—also persists in scratching this surface. Through both *sotto voce* comments and outright declarations affected in different vocal tones and dialects, his presence reminds the viewer of the historical importance of regionalism throughout Italy, as well as the contemporary struggles facing the string of short-lived postwar governments that perpetuated Italy's schizophrenic form of nationalism. By 1950 the Marshall Plan representatives in Italy seemed finally to be making a dent in stabilizing the interim governments that had served to exacerbate fragmentation and division in the climate of reconstruction. However, they did so by advocating an emerging model of capitalism that would be overseen by autonomous public boards, which in actual practice demonstrated a great deal of continuity with the political and institutional organizations of the Fascist period. The distribution of the *Itinerari* series in theaters throughout Italy and to Italian diasporic populations beyond Italy served to further reinforce the sense of stability the De Gasperi government wished to project (Ratopoulos 2009).

### **Silvio Gigli: Pierrot Guides the People**

With Gigli—a print journalist turned wartime radio personality turned character actor—as their jovial guide, Italians were again being encouraged to revisit the glories of their past in the realms of art and architecture, literature and politics, commerce, and food culture. It is important to note that the recognition of regional artisanal and gastronomic customs and specialties that are on display in the *Itinerari* was not only the domain of the centrist Christian Democrats. The Neofascists and the conservative Catholic Action groups' political philosophies also drew heavily on a reinvigoration of the medieval and Renaissance structure of guilds that would allow for a sense of the collective while also maintaining the status of the individual as a specialized worker or craftsman, therefore linking their material output to a larger postwar industrial enterprise. In many ways these specialized regional enterprises shared more with earlier Italian forms of mercantilism than they did with the idealized versions of postwar communism or capitalism that are actively addressed in the MP films. Concurrent with Gigli's appearances on the big screen, he remained a constant presence on Italian radio, writing and appearing in many educational programs aimed at housewives and school children. This familiar, benevolent voice would

now take Italians on a journey to reclaim and redeem an imaginary of a unified past, so that Italy might then move toward an actual and unified future. While the distinct charms and histories of each region come to light in the individual episodes, the general formula across all *Itinerari* films remains consistent. It was a formula borrowed from Gigli's postwar radio work on a show called *Sorella Radio* (Sister radio), which featured a series of "impossible" interviews conducted by Gigli and Maria Luisa Boncompagni with well-known (and long-dead) Italian cultural icons, such as Luigi Pirandello, Guglielmo Marconi, and Grazia Deledda (respectively a playwright, an inventor, and a novelist).

Each itinerary film features a title sequence that places the coats of arms (a vestige of Italian feudalism) of the region in the upper-left-hand corner of the frame and then opens onto a scene that is identified as an iconic representation for the region featured in the episode. Once the scene is set, Gigli inserts himself into the center of the action, yet immediately identifies himself as an outsider. On occasion, he is the sole outsider, appearing next to a local (or locals), yet more often school children or attractive young women are his travel companions. The women move through the regions with Gigli as direct visual evidence of the new freedoms and mobility the postwar economy afforded women in the home, the workplace, and in leisure time pursuits. The school children, while also functioning in their role figuratively, display less autonomy than Gigli's female fellow travelers. The children are usually featured in opening scenes shot indoors, in a studio that recreates a classroom setting, which Gigli immediately identifies as a studio set.

From this constructed classroom space Gigli poses a question about Italian history or culture specific to the featured region of the *Itinerari* episode and thus launches the narrative trajectory for the film: one in which the viewer also becomes Gigli's pupil. The school children do not ask questions to Gigli, they simply respond to his prompts, echoing general details of the biographies of the historical figures as Gigli recalls or recites a piece of poetry or prose that was written by a famous (and long dead) author from the featured region. This cues the spectators from the outset that they too will embark on a journey and share in the appreciation and knowledge of Italian traditions, genius, and national cultural characteristics—in sum, the soul of Italy.

These grand themes speak to the multiple levels of mobility that the films seek to convey. As Gigli guides the viewer through a series of immediate and contemporary scenes of the geography and architecture of the featured region, the viewer is simultaneously on an anachronistic tour of



Figure 1.1. Screen capture of the opening scene in *Itinerari Italiani: Lombardia* (dir. Guido Rosada, IT, 1949). Note the conspicuous presence of the map of Italy above the heads of the schoolchildren whom Gigli is quizzing about the renowned Lombardian poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni, whose novel *I promessi sposi* (*The betrothed*) is considered a symbol of the Risorgimento and a key work in the development of a unified Italian language. Courtesy of Archivio storico Istituto Luce, NARA Archives.

Italy's intellectual, philosophical, and artistic past. As Baudrillard observes, traveling as a tourist often involves going in search of lost time. In this way, the Italy that Gigli presents to the viewer is neither real nor fake, but rather "perfect." This idealized landscape is one that Italian audiences cannot completely internalize or externalize, and thus it remains a sort of "elsewhere," yet by no means *Strapaese* (Baudrillard 1996). While the particularities of the geography and topography of each region are immediately identified and the landscape is laid out, most often in a bird's-eye view or overhead shot that allows Gigli, his travel companions, and the viewer to map its significance for the region in the first few minutes of the film, the viewer is not encouraged to move through the physical landscape in a north/south or east/west fashion. Such a trajectory would be functional, in the sense that it would aid the traveler in moving from point A to point B, but it would reduce the meaning of the journey and further localize, rather than idealize, its construct. Instead, spectators are drawn into the picturesque and romantic landscapes in much the same way that viewers admiring a painting find themselves drawn to a particular aspect due to the use of color, light, or shadow. Gigli and his travel companions encourage an emotional or sensory response to the iconic images and seemingly banal scenarios onscreen, enabling the region and map that lies before the viewer to retain their essential Italian-ness.

## Traveling through Paper Trails: The Archives' Structuring Absences

Because these Incom titles are not part of the accessible Luce archives housed in Rome, which have meticulously documented the release dates of every *La settimana Incom* episode that they hold, I have not been able to find the records that would provide proof of which *Itinerari Italiani* episode was produced and exhibited first. In 2000, Istituto Luce organized a symposium on the Incom newsreel series that took place in Naples, Italy, and in 2001 they published the proceedings in the first anthology to focus solely on these newsreels: *La settimana Incom. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni '50* (*La settimana Incom: Newsreels and information in the 1950s*). The work of historians Gian Piero Brunetta and Pierre Sorlin, who have devoted their careers to the study of Italian cinema, appears alongside the writings of lesser-known Italian film historians. In eight chapters there is not a single mention of the *Itinerari Italiani* films made between 1949 and 1951. The absence of these titles is most notable in the chapter written by Sandro Bernardi, "Immagini di Paesaggio [Images of travel]." Bernardi's research focuses on a variety of travelogue films produced by Incom between 1948 and 1954 that focus on presenting Italy to Italians, but he does not mention any of the MP-funded *Itinerari Italiani* films that I have located. It is also worth noting that the newsreels that he focuses on are much shorter episodes, running only about two minutes from start to finish.

Bernardi describes the aesthetic in the films he has viewed as "anti-neorealism," but the *Itinerari Italiani* do utilize elements of neorealism and vice versa, as neorealism's aesthetic took inspiration from earlier forms of documentary cinema and narrative cinema and most importantly because the MP films were actively attempting to replicate popular contemporary Italian cinema. The *Itinerari* episodes featuring Rome and Florence incorporate scenes that are almost identically framed to scenes in *Paisà* (Paisan, dir. Roberto Rossellini, IT, 1946) and *Roma, città aperta* (Rome, open city, dir. Roberto Rossellini, IT, 1945), representing the spaces of Rome and Florence in compositions that directly reflect their earlier renderings by Roberto Rossellini. Other official MP titles seem to take images from films such as *Ladri di biciclette* (Bicycle thieves, dir. Vittorio De Sica, IT, 1948) whole cloth (most notably the Italian production *Aquila* directed by Jacopo Erbi for ECA Italy, circa 1950, appearing two years after the international success of De Sica's film). Yet Bernardi does recognize that these travelogues represent a form of cinematic work that is attempting to come to terms with the dichotomies of Italian postwar society in much the same way that I have

noted that the *Itinerari* do: by balancing the newfound demands of the young postwar Italian nation with the persistent rivalry of Italian regionalism. Bernardi rightly observes that the Incom travelogue that presented Italy to Italians was working to construct an Italian ideal and to constitute an Italian spectator by demonstrating that the apparatus of cinema, travel, and cultural exchange could help Italians reconstruct their own Italian imaginary.

It stands to reason that most film historians would not think to look through the records of the US State Department to locate commercially produced Italian newsreels. While this is an oversight that film and cultural historians have only recently begun to rectify, it is—in my professional opinion as a film archivist who worked for a US government institution that constantly conducted transnational research and exchanges with state and private archives—a less excusable oversight for a state-sponsored institution and moving image archive such as Luce.

Synthesizing new knowledge from existing material records requires being able to (re)locate materials that are often hiding in plain sight. Historian Altuğ Akin's recent publication *Marshall Plan Films and Documentaries: A Meditation on Origin of Communication for Development in Turkey* (2021) pushes the discourse surrounding the MP films' "long tail" by locating the ways in which the rhetoric of the ERP as imagined by the Marshall Plan's visual information campaigns has extended far beyond the screen. His observations on the MP films produced in Turkey, a country that received significant MP aid and was therefore the focus of several MP films, and the genealogy of development discourse globally is a fresh and much needed approach to studying the ramifications of the MP visual information campaigns as both soft and flexible forms of power. Turkey did not enter WWII until February 1945, when it joined the Allies, but Akin argues that the MP films that feature Turkey represent the first clear articulation of what he terms "communication for development." They help chart the emergence of long-range (multiyear and multigenerational) economic and social policies and programs for international development that can trace their roots in large part to the Marshall Plan's emphasis on local actors engaged in global relief circuits that are linked to global, neoliberal political agendas.

Just as the *Itinerari* sought to smooth over the differences among the distinct regions of Italy, a new mode of thinking on the part of historians, researchers, and archivists must be imagined and a more thorough understanding of the entrenched practices of organization within archival institutions must be realized so that these materials do not remain ghettoized.





Figure 1.2. Screen capture of a bird's-eye view of the Incom Studios on the lot of Luce. This image is featured in several *La Settimana Incom* newsreels from December and January 1952 that highlight the activities of the XIII Mostra Cinematografica di Venezia (13th Venice Film Festival). By 1952, the bird's-eye view of Italy that Incom presents is not a picturesque *Itinerari Italiani* landscape, but an aerial shot of the Luce back lots in Rome—the actual location where Incom's Italian imaginary was produced. Courtesy of Archivio storico Istituto Luce, NARA Archives.

Even though I cannot be certain of the order in which the *Itinerari Italiani* films were produced and released, I introduced the titles of the episodes in this chapter according to their north–south orientation on the peninsula, leaving the two island regions of Sicily and Sardinia “floating” at the end of the list. By doing so, I have privileged a view of Italy that historically has been relatively equally accepted and perpetuated by Italians and non-Italians, and that the *Itinerari* films make evident, indicating the Marshall Planners' ongoing attempts to bring a certain sense of smoothness and order to what they perceived as rich, rugged, and temperamental terrain. No matter what regional and identifiably Italian cultural traditions are charted in these individual films, the rubble (Fascism, metaphorically, and Italy, literally) of the postwar landscape, as presented by the Marshall Planners, was a kind of *tabula rasa* on which a modern, healthy, just, and prosperous capitalist civilization could be created. US diplomats considered the early years of reconstruction from 1946 to 1947 a sort of Wild West that, while erratic and unpredictable, also represented a new frontier in terms of the possibilities for international economic cooperation and trade. While many Italian political factions may have been more inclined to view this moment as a possibility for a twentieth-century *Risorgimento*, an Italian state free of international dependence and entanglements, was not to be. In fact, in May 1947, after the crisis in the new De Gasperi administration, when the

PCI was thrown out of government, Secretary of State Marshall met with Italian Ambassador Tarchiani in Washington several times to reassure complete support for De Gasperi's center right coalition and to establish a strategy of Italian dependence on the US to consolidate internal stability and strength for De Gasperi's anti-communist efforts. A mere five days later, Marshall delivered his historic speech at Harvard. Therefore, the *Itinerari* films visually articulate this political and cartographic view of Italy, at the moment that it is being reimagined and produced by Italians and by Americans (Ginsborg 2003).

### Redeeming the Grand Tour for the Cold War

Despite the persistent message of American economic aid as the driving force behind the rebuilding of Europe in the mid-twentieth century, the convincing theme that emerges across these films is the debt that the "old" and the "new" worlds owe to each other and the ancient cultural and political origins that they share. Cooperation is tantamount and possible because of this shared understanding and appreciation of Western civilization. While postwar Italy had fallen far from the glorious days of the Roman Empire, nostalgia for this era remained. This nostalgia had circulated in European cultural and political discourse for well over a century. As Nelson Moe points out in *The View from Vesuvius* (another nod to the bird's-eye perspective), his pivotal study of Italian culture and the Southern question, at the dawn of the nineteenth-century French novelist Madame de Staël writes that "[t]he Italians are much more outstanding for what they have been and by what they might be than by what they are now" (Moe 2002, 17).

This is but one example of a multitude of literary and political texts from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, written by Italians and non-Italians alike, that hearken back to a time when Italy was respected and revered for its economic and cultural productivity, and that call for a reinvention of that moment in the contemporary moment. In keeping with emphasizing the benefits of MP-sponsored productivity initiatives, the *Itinerari* draw on this font of nostalgia and desire for progress to emphasize the new or refurbished industries in each featured region. Historian Rolf Petri terms this industrialization strategy "neomercantilism" (Petri, 1995). Mercantilism was the dominant school of economic theory in Europe throughout the late Renaissance and early modern period (from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries). Viewing the MP initiatives in this light reinforces an idea of economic nationalism and recalls the less distant past

of Fascist corporativism as well as a European and American indebtedness to a common past, rooted in systems of trade, capital, and empire. The MP films exemplify the emerging postwar transnational rhetoric of development that precedes the period of decolonization and that supersedes an earlier colonial discourse of humanitarianism that is more concerned with the maintenance of an economically and socially underdeveloped status quo. This is achieved by contrasting images of “backward” conditions, under which rural and urban Italians lived up until 1945, to a “productive and normalized” environment that Marshall aid has brought to both the urban and rural segments of Italian society. During the MP years, US foreign policy constantly overlapped between these strategic and ideological dimensions (Esposito 1994). The smooth logic that the US State Department attempted to employ for US and Italian economic gain often became mired in its delivery when the joint efforts of the US and Italy failed to mesh ideologically.

The *Itinerari* consistently evoke these shared cultural constructs and political tensions through a variety of registers and a variety of characters, nearly all of whom are given voice by Gigli, who is equally at ease playing the professor, the gentleman, the statesmen, or the clown. It is indeed his role as clown that is most important and most exploited throughout the *Itinerari* series, and that enables a reading of these films by Italian audiences that will not allow us to move smoothly over the map of Italy from the industrialized North to the impoverished South without unveiling diachronous boundaries. Here I employ the geological definition of “diachronous” that implies both a transgression and regression, as well as progressive development of marine environments, as a metonymic device for understanding imperialism in and by island and peninsular nations. As the shoreline advances or retreats, a succession of continuous deposits representing different environments (for example, beach, shallow water, deep water) may be left behind. Although each type of deposit may be continuous over a large area, its age varies according to the position of the shoreline through time. In much the same way, the historical record and developments between Italian and US cinema are dependent on cultural variations.

### **Blending Grand *Itinerari Italiani* Films to Vernacular Meanderings**

While the *Itinerari* films are meant to be quick cinematic excursions—running just slightly over ten minutes and sometimes just slightly over twenty minutes—providing glimpses into the daily life of the region for which each episode is named, their brevity required a form of narrative construction

that would allow for diachronous, multilayered representations to reveal and conceal themselves within the space of each episode. These shorts were also in dialogue with the feature films that would follow them in the theater. From 1949 to 1951, despite the massive influx of American films in Italian theaters and the significant sums of money American studios invested in publicity campaigns for Hollywood films in Italy, Italian films were stronger at the box office than their American counterparts due to the strength of Italian comedies that featured regional stars, appealing to both Italian regional vernacular and topographical memories (Treveri Gennari 2009). Following Treveri Gennari we can assume that some diachronic vestige of cultural memory persisted alongside the anachronistic images the Marshall Planners sought to institutionalize with the help of cinema. And yet, another publication by Italian film historian Raffaele De Berti notes that 1930s Italian comedy was influenced greatly by a Hollywood imaginary and represents a transnational mode of filmmaking for Italian spectators and the Italian film industry (De Berti 2004). Juxtaposing De Berti and Treveri Gennari's arguments, a diachronic vestige persists. It demonstrates that MP films in Italy were never simply Italian or American; they were constantly negotiating a more complex shared genealogy and always reimagining it.

The *Itinerari* films, while simple and often comedic, demanded a great deal of historical knowledge from their spectators. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Gigli is often called "professor." The viewer essentially receives a history lesson in each film and is expected to be conversant in eighteenth-century political and economic writings, as well as the writings of Italian philosophers and literary figures who responded to the new and positive understanding of "civilization" as coterminous with capitalism. While the Risorgimento period in Italy is marked by festering moral and political concerns about capitalism, these are ultimately resolved with the triumph of liberal capitalism and the construction of the Italian nation state. By the time of Unification in 1860, the ancient Italian past was being evoked both within and beyond the borders of the newly formed Italian nation. As Benedict Anderson notes, nineteenth-century projects of nation-building relied on Roman antiquity as the symbolic lingua franca of "new emerging nations" that "imagined themselves antique" (Anderson 1991). The *Itinerari* films implicitly and explicitly echo this successful formula when delivering their mid-twentieth-century message of Italian national identity and reclamation.

The *Itinerari* as a group also rely on an Italian imaginary that was manufactured by Northern Europeans (rather than Americans) and perpetuated by Italians in the early to mid-1800s: The Grand Tour. Noblemen in the eighteenth century completed their education with a period of European

travel. This so-called Grand Tour could last from a few months to several years, therefore restricting it to only the very wealthy, with the time and means to travel. By undertaking the tour, young men learned about the politics, culture, and art of neighboring lands. The primary destination of the tour was Italy, with its heritage of ancient Roman monuments. Eighteenth-century taste revered the art and culture of the ancients. The British, in particular, were lured to Italy by their admiration of antiquity and their desire to see monuments such as the Roman Colosseum or the wonders of nature such as Vesuvius. Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the birth of a middle class, the tour was no longer a noble birthright and no longer limited to men, or Northern Europeans. While the length and focus of the Grand Tour had changed, the general fascination with monuments of ancient civilization and culture remained.

While the MP influence in these films provides for a clear message of reclamation, productivity, and progress, the aesthetic is not simply that of a dry, didactic documentary. It functions through a more romantic and picturesque understanding of Italy that emerged from the travel writings of such literary giants as Goethe and Stendhal and the landscape paintings of nineteenth-century Northern European visitors to Italy. These films capitalize on a certain understanding of “Italianicity” and “Southernism” and convey this message through images that evoke the pastoral, poverty, passion, and beauty of the Italian land and people, using moving images in much the same way that first painting and then photography had been used during the age of the Grand Tour to commodify and fetishize cosmopolitan tourism for Italians and foreigners alike (Bertellini 2010, 66). At the same time, by employing an evocative, yet informational style of storytelling that allows the viewer to glimpse grand and harsh landscapes in much the same manner as earlier social realist documentaries, the *Itinerari* also remind us of what many historians have confirmed: “the Marshall Plan was the fruit of the New Deal and not the Cold War, and so sought to modify mentalities, attitudes and expectations in the long term [...] under benevolent American guidance” (Ellwood 2007, 430). The *Itinerari* films hold onto a romantic, utopian vision of international cooperation that all but disappears from US government-sponsored films by 1952, as catch phrases such as “productivity” and “progress,” which suggest camaraderie, are replaced by words such as “strength” and “freedom,” which suggest domination.

From the most recent past the *Itinerari* audience would recognize the recycling of an aesthetic employed by the filmmakers working under Fascism and popularized by those working in the neorealist moment who were successful as long as they created feature films that could be framed by

“real life,” using nonprofessional actors, documentary footage, and shooting on location in recognizable places, thus encouraging audience identification in order to endow the people and places depicted with a collective, Italian (national) resonance. But, in keeping with tracing and mapping Italian origins—even cinematic ones—to a more distant past, these films also utilize an earlier aesthetic from Italian silent cinema—what Giorgio Bertellini terms “pathetic realism.” Deriving from the term “pathos,” this earlier form of realism is a pastiche of the catastrophic film that blends fictional scenes with newsreel footage to create realistic melodramas of pathos and much needed redemption (Bertellini 2010, 66). These aesthetic representations of redemption are then mapped onto literal projects of reclamation carried out by the MP and reflected in the *Itinerari* films. The stock of “themes and issues” that have given Italian social and political life meaning since unification in the 1870s are directly addressed in these Incom films. These themes include “the weakness and inefficiency of the state; the strength of the Catholic Church in Italian society; the class consciousness of significant sections of Italian urban and rural workers; [and] the enduring problems of the South” (Ginsborg 2003, 2).

A form of *commedia dell'arte* is employed in the *Itinerari* that also works to smooth over the weightier subjects of postwar reunification and industrialization for which each region seems to have a different solution. The development of masks and “types” or “genres,” which began in sixteenth-century Italian theater, was still very much utilized in Italian film and understood by Italian audiences. The emergence of the female actress as well as improvised performance based on sketches and scenarios are credited to this form of theater. Yet again, while the origins of *commedia* are rooted in Italy, it is the French and the British who are credited with transforming this theatrical style into a form of political satire during the age of the Grand Tour. Perhaps even more telling in relation to the theme of travel featured in the *Itinerari* series, the key to success of the *commedia* troupes was their reliance on travel to achieve fame and financial success. The *Itinerari* films play with this theme of travel on several levels, and Gigli functions as a dynamic leader of the MP troupe. As Daniela Treveri Gennari reminds us in her discussion of postwar Italian comedies, for foreign films to compete with Italian films on local screens in the late 1940s and early 1950s, “to gain the spectator’s interest, American films had to do a bit more than merely be American” (Treveri Gennari 2009, 55). Thus, while Gigli and his mid-twentieth-century troupe of attractive young women and wide-eyed schoolboys are entertaining audiences with their flirtatious romps and well-learned recitations as tourists and students of their own culture, they simultaneously rely on a



Figure 1.3. Screen capture from *Itinerari Italiani: Lazio* (dir. Antonio Marchi, IT, 1949). In this second shot of the opening scene Gigli and a young girl are chauffeured along the Appian Way as the young woman asks Gigli several questions about the signs along the road. Courtesy of Archivio storico Istituto Luce, NARA Archives.

lingua franca that presupposes an Italian movie-going audience that would be familiar with earlier representations of Italianicity in film as well as a mode of address that recalls their theatrical traditions.

The attractive young women who appear on screen with Gigli are never confined to the studio set or classroom. Instead, they physically travel with Gigli, in both the city and the countryside, appearing in opening scenes as diverse as a convertible sport coupe on a tour around the city streets of Rome (*Lazio*), a flower garden in Liguria (*Liguria*), or a trattoria in Sicily (*Sicilia*). The young women also pose questions directly to Gigli, rather than waiting for him to ask them questions. They are often seeking his help, they are not at all shy in asking for it, and he is always happy to comply. These are two very distinct foils for Gigli, who is a physically corpulent little man with an almost cartoonish face. When appearing alongside school children, Gigli is seated at a desk, near a chalkboard and speaks in an authoritative, yet still kind and jovial tone. The students stand alongside the desk, occupying a different space within the frame than that occupied by Gigli. In contrast, in the scenes with women, Gigli and the young ladies appear side by side, either all are seated, or all are standing, and the women fill up as much of the frame as Gigli, oftentimes standing taller than him. In these scenes, Gigli becomes the pupil, flirtatiously studying the body of the woman that can be construed as standing in for the nation.

In these *Itinerari* films, the obvious message is that what is finally and ultimately redeemed is the state apparatus. However, issues of religion, class, and

regionalism remain, and complicate the metanarrative of state-sponsored and sanctioned progress. Utilizing the pre-existing Italian newsreel infrastructure created by Luce in the late 1930s, the *Itinerari Italiani* bear no obvious stamps of the fact that the US government funded them, outwardly carrying only the La settimana Incom label. As a result of these factors, combined with the films' reliance on the popular comedic genre, the series was well received throughout the peninsula (ECA Paris 1950). Whether the voice delivering the message of reclamation was Italian or American, the *Itinerari Italiani* of the ECA, Incom, and Luce were successful in demonstrating the immediate benefits of Marshall aid to the Italian economy and civic infrastructure. The statistics indeed favor an image of progress, yet questions emerge; fault lines and fissures persist in this topography of reclamation that presupposes a unified historic imaginary. As early as 1955, the US State Department issued critiques of US foreign trade practices in its monthly bulletin. While recognizing that European economic productivity had risen far above its prewar levels, officials acknowledged that in Italy in particular this improvement did not halt the rise of communism. In electoral terms, the communists were stronger in Italy in 1953 than when the MP began in 1948 (Barnett 1955). The role of the workers themselves in shaping their Italian imaginary, vis-à-vis the rest of Europe at the end of the MP era, cannot be overlooked. The Italians' imaginary was not based solely on the desires mapped onto their vernacular cultures and their physical bodies by the cinematic ideals of their government leaders and the commercial film industry, it went deeper and touched the very (red) human hearts of the Italian people.

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## 2. Documentary Filmmaking in Postwar Germany, 1945–55

An Essay on the History of Production, Distribution, and Technology<sup>1</sup>

*Jeanpaul Goergen and Kay Hoffmann*

### Abstract

Documentaries developed in different directions in divided Germany after WWII. The 35 mm film technology used was the same and the short films and newsreels had a permanent place as a supporting program of the cinemas. In both states, only a few full-length documentaries were made, most of which were shown in matinee events. In the GDR, documentaries were primarily used as a political tool. In the Federal Republic numerous information films tried to influence public opinion. Jeanpaul Goergen describes the film technology and the distribution channels of the documentaries, and Kay Hoffmann concentrates on the production conditions of the newsreels and their political orientation.

**Keywords:** documentary film, informational film, cultural film, amateur filmmaking, newsreels, film technology

The reconstruction of the film economy in the first ten years after the end of the war developed differently in the two German states, and this is also true for the area of documentary. At first what they had in common was that there were only a very few new full-length documentaries made, and production was limited to short formats and newsreels, which then ran as supporting programs. Therefore, the short documentary as well as the

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Daniel Hendrickson.

newsreels are in the focus of the current chapter, in which Jeanpaul Goergen presents the film technology and looks into the production and distribution conditions of the various documentary genres. The state of the film industry in the postwar years in the areas of film technology, production, and distribution, together with the film policy framework, had an impact on both the aesthetic shape and content of documentary films. However, this cannot be understood as a direct and immediate influence; rather, we are dealing with a network of conditions for authors and producers which influenced their decisions. These factors determined the whole production of documentary films, and don't allow to single out a group of films or even an individual film. In its first part, this chapter sheds light on these general conditions of documentary film work.

Following this, Kay Hoffmann presents the newsreels, which were initially developed and controlled by the four victorious powers as a means of re-education and were later privatized in West Germany. The newsreels used the same 35 mm technology as documentary filmmakers but were under other production conditions due to the imperative for timeliness and the necessary brevity of their subjects.

### **Economic and Technological Parameters**

Following the unconditional surrender in 1945 the Allies took apart the National Socialist film complex and forbade the Germans from any filmmaking activities; production and distribution was disrupted (Hauser 1989). After the gradual reopening of cinemas, the occupying powers first distributed their own films, hastily dubbed or subtitled in German. In this way, they attempted to directly influence the population in their respective occupation zones politically, but also to win them over in the sense of soft cultural propaganda by positively highlighting national achievements from all areas and by providing information about culture, lifestyle, and remarkable natural landscapes. As Merkel (2016, 224) writes, the documentary section in cinemas in the three western zones primarily contained "conflict-free images of the various societies," which were more or less direct advertisements for the Allied countries and their lifestyles.

In July of 1945 in the Soviet occupation zone in Germany the political documentaries *Maiparade in Moskau 1945* (Moscow May Day Parade, dir. S. Bubrik, I. Wensher, and I. Ssetkina, USSR, 1945), *Berlin* (dir. Juli Raisman, USSR, 1945), and *Wien ist wieder frei* (Vienna is free again, dir. I. Posselskij, USSR, 1945) opened in the cinemas (A. S. 1945). These

were supplemented with travel shorts from the Soviet Union, sports films, and short and long films such as *Auf Tierpfaden* (Along animal tracks, USSR, 1946) by the well-known nature documentarist Boris Dolin (Theaternachrichten Eildienst 1947; Presse- und Werbedienst der Sovexportfilm GmbH 1949).

The Americans distributed their films through the Allgemeine Filmverleih (AFI), which was founded especially for this purpose (Goergen 2005b). The comprehensive program included *The Autobiography of a "Jeep"* (dir. Irving Lerner, US, 1943)<sup>2</sup>, produced by the Office of War Information, in which a jeep depicts its war experiences, and the color film *The Cowboy* (US Department of State, US, 1949) about the unromantic everyday life of a cattle dealer (Hahn 1997).

While the French occupying forces distributed their films mostly through the Internationale Film-Allianz GmbH (IFA), the British founded the distribution group Atlas-Film GmbH in their zone. The first German-dubbed French documentaries included such titles as *Segelflieger* (Glider pilot, FR, before 1947), *Kinematograph* (Cinematograph, FR, before 1947), and *Wüstenräuber* (Desert robber, FR, before 1947) (dubbing in Geiseltasteig, 1947). The British distribution program started with *Erntezeit in England* (*The Crown of the Year*, dir. Ralph Keene, UK, 1943), *Schiffswerft in Schottland* (*Clydebuilt*, dir. Robin Carruthers, UK, 1943), and *New Zealand* (UK, 1943, Crown Film Unit) (Clemens 1997, 179). In all four zones the Allies showed the so-called "atrocities" films, with their shocking footage taken at the liberated concentration and extermination camps (Goergen 2005a; Weckel 2012).

Alongside fiction films, numerous documentaries from the period of National Socialism were denazified in the western zones and released for public screening. These were in part industrial films, and in part especially depictions of landscapes and cities, such as *Das Schachdorf* (Village of chess, dir. Hanns Springer, GER, 1940). This film about the village of Ströbeck in Saxony-Anhalt was running as early as September 1945 in the French zone, together with an issue of the *Les Actualités Françaises* newsreel, including *Bilder aus Paris in den Augusttagen 1944* (Pictures from Paris in the days of August 1944), which ran in the supporting program before the Austrian feature film *Die Julika* (also known as *Ernte* [Harvest], dir. Géza von Bolváry, AU, 1936).

2 Film available at <https://www.filmpreservation.org/preserved-films/screening-room/ti-the-autobiography-of-a-jeep-1943>

## Beginning of New Production

After the German film corporation DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) was founded on May 17, 1946, about ninety short documentaries were made in the Soviet occupation zone in Germany by the end of the year: election films for the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED, Socialist Unity Party of Germany), guidance for overcoming the most pressing problems, and reports about clearing away war damages and the first reconstruction efforts with *Berlin im Aufbau* (Berlin under construction, dir. Kurt Maetzig, GER-East, 1946)<sup>3</sup> and *Dresden* (Dresden, dir. Richard Groschopp, GER-East, 1946).<sup>4</sup> Some of them were information films that responded directly to the postwar emergency with practical advice, while others were outspoken advertising films for SED.

In the three western zones film production got off to a slow start, which was due not only to the slow licensing of producers but also to a lack of raw film stock. The only documentary verified for 1946 is the traffic training film *Grün, Gelb, Rot* (Green, yellow, red, dir. Eugen von Bongardt, GER-West, 1946) by the French licensed Herold-Film and shot by Eugen von Bongardt on commission from the Berlin Magistrate. Only on January 7, 1947, does General Robert A. McClure, director of the American military's Information Control sign the first ten licenses for German film producers in the American Zone, including the documentary producer Gabriele Schmalzigaug from Schwaben-Film-Produktion in Stuttgart, Hubert Schonger, and Curt Oertel. While in the case of Schmalzigaug this was a newly founded company, Schonger and Oertel were established film producers even before 1945, and were able, like many others involved in documentary filmmaking, to continue their work after the end of the war (Hoffmann 2009). In the GDR as well, the film industry was marked by a strong continuity in personnel in all trades.

Numerous small film production companies arose in the subsequent period in West Germany, but many disappeared from the market again after only a few titles due to their unprofitability (Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde 1953, 1–69). The only companies that were able to last for a longer period were either those that were well established regionally or that featured a specialization, such as Fritz Boehner's Boehner-Film (Erlangen, Hamburg) with industrial films, Alfred-Erhardt-Film (Hamburg) with artistic documentaries and travelogues, Wolfgang Kiepenheuer's Ikaros-Film

3 Film available at <https://progress.film/> (registration required).

4 Film available at <https://progress.film/> (registration required).



Figure 2.1. Franz Schroedter and his chief cameraman, Fritz Arno Wagner, check the lighting conditions in a spacious factory workshop that cannot be illuminated with normal effort. The full-length color film *Aus eigener Kraft* (By one's own effort, FRG, 1954) documented the production of the Volkswagen in Wolfsburg. Foto: DFF—Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum. Unknown photographer.



Figure 2.2. Franz Schroedter (with his back to the camera), the director of the feature-length documentary *Aus eigener Kraft* (By one's own effort, FRG, 1954) on the production of the Volkswagen, at the assembly line in the plant in Wolfsburg, which has to be illuminated with considerable effort. Foto: DFF—Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum. Unknown photographer.



(West Berlin) with political information films, Hans Cürlis's Kulturfilm-Institut (West Berlin) with films on the topic of the visual arts, and Roto-Film (Hamburg) with nature and animal documentaries. The so-called cultural film department at UFA, which remained highly influential until 1945, lost its preeminence and started producing mainly industrial and business films. Of the larger feature film producers, only Comedia-Film (Munich), Filmaufbau (Göttingen), and Realfilm (Hamburg) maintained their own production of documentaries for a short time.

Most West German documentaries from the period immediately after the war were shot according to a script, which was developed along with and approved by the client. Structures usually needed to be built to capture the desired angles and shots, and tracks often had to be laid and interior spaces had to be elaborately lit. The production company thus not only had to have these devices ready, but also had to have the necessary professionals at its disposal. For the fictional scenes that helped to lighten up the documentary quality, which remained popular into the 1950s, it was also necessary to engage actors, which added to the costs of the production.

In the Soviet occupation zone in Germany and the GDR, the production of documentaries was centralized at DEFA and divided into various branches, which were later restructured several times. In 1952, the Studio for Newsreels and Documentaries was established, followed by the Studio for Popular Science Films at the beginning of 1953. Distribution was managed centrally, first by Sojusintorgkino, the later Sovexportfilm and DEFA Film Distribution, then starting in 1950 by Progress Film Distribution (DEFA-Stiftung n.d.c).

In the three western zones as well as in West Germany and West Berlin, following the authorization of unrestricted film distribution in the Trizone in October 1948, above all due to protests by documentary film producers, there was a reinstatement of the regulations that had been in place since the 1920s, according to which the screening of a film with a rating resulted in a reduction in the entertainment tax for the cinema owners. This regulation encouraged distributors to buy and deliver films for a supplementary program. The Filmbewertungsstelle der Länder der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (FBW, Film Rating Board of the States of the Federal Republic of Germany), founded at the end of 1951, was responsible for the ratings of "valuable" and "especially valuable." But not all films got a rating; those without one had next to no chance of finding distribution. Of particular importance for documentary films was the fact that they had to be approved for viewing by young people by the Self-Regulatory Body of the Movie Industry (or FSK, Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft), which was established in

the summer of 1949. This institution often acted as a board of censorship, ordering cuts of violent or politically inappropriate scenes.

## Film Formats

In both German states almost all documentaries meant to be rated for cinema use were shot in 35 mm format with a ratio of 1.33:1 during the period examined here. But documentaries were also created in 16 mm, which Kodak in the US had introduced for amateur use in 1923. This was flame-resistant safety film, which quickly found its way into noncommercial film production as well, due to its ease of operation and a significantly lower price point. In Germany starting in the 1930s, alongside film purchased for home cinema use, 16 mm was used mostly for training and educational films as well as industrial and business films; these films were in use above all in noncommercial distribution and in schools. Initially, hardly anything changed after 1945 in this respect.

In West Germany there were only a few companies that exclusively produced films on 16 mm. Starting in 1949–50 Toni Nett (Stuttgart), Sigma-Film (West Berlin), and Bergverlag Rudolf Rother (Munich) started producing silent sports educational films (Nikolai 1952, 9). The private filmmaker Johann Wolf from Nordhorn continued on from his earlier *Heimat* films and between 1951 and 1961 produced numerous 16 mm silent films for the series *Heimatfilm der Grafschaft Bentheim* (Homeland film of the County of Bentheim, dir. Johann Wolf, FRG, 1951–61). Also working with the narrower film format, Karl-Heinz Kramer shot the feature-length portrait *Münsterland im Wandel der Zeiten* (Münsterland through the ages, dir. Karl-Heinz Kramer, FRG, 1955) between 1953 and 1955, from the proceeds of which he then purchased a 35 mm camera and established himself as a professional film producer (Graf 2009, 18f.).

In West Germany there had, however, also already been attempts to utilize the new CinemaScope technique for the supplementary film program. In 1955 Ferdinand Khittl shot the short film *Auf geht's* (Let's go, dir. Ferdinand Khittl, FRG, 1955) in the French Cinépanoramic technique in the aspect ratio 2.35:1.<sup>5</sup> The satirical treatment of the Munich Oktoberfest was shown with the Austrian CinemaScope feature film *Der Kongreß tanzt* (The congress dances, dir. Franz Antel, AU, 1955) (Film-Echo 1955). In the same year Hamburg-based filmmaker Adalbert Baltes used a borrowed CinemaScope camera to shoot

5 *Die Parallelstraße*, DVD, Edition filmmuseum, 2010.

short films such as *Weißes Segel – Blaues Meer* (White sail – Blue sea, FRG, 1955) about the sailing regattas at Kiel Week. After five more CinemaScope films he became disillusioned and returned to the normal format – the films had failed to receive a rating from the FBW, presumably because of the conventional way he shot his films, and the additional expenditures did not pay off (Verein Film- und Fernsehmuseum Hamburg 2022). As a technological experiment Boehner-Film shot a few stereoscopic films in color. These films, which harken back to their stereoscopic film productions from 1937, were advertisements for Volkswagen AG or were presentations of numerous rubber products from Continental AG (Eckardt 2004, 53ff.).

In the commercial cinemas in both German states, the 16 mm format at first did not play any significant role. In West Germany, however, a few 16 mm-only cinemas were established, such as the Filmstudio Lux, which opened as a train station cinema in Cologne in 1953 (Schmalfilm 1953, 54). At the end of 1954 there were already 150 stationary cinemas organized into a narrow-gauge movie theater ring (Dein Film 1954, 16–9). The distributors now were offering more and more narrow-gauge films, but among them were hardly any German documentaries. Until 1955 FSK only rated around fifty German 16 mm documentaries.<sup>6</sup> About half of them were silent, privately made films as well as short industrial and educational films, which thus obtained authorization for public screening to young people. The verified titles were primarily industrial films and longer commercials; but also informational films such as *Die Arbeitstherapie* (Occupational therapy, dir. Robert Luther, FRG, 1955) by the Schleswig-Holstein Coalition to Fight Tuberculosis and *Belgien – Land der toten Soldaten* (Belgium – Land of dead soldiers, FRG, 1955) by the German War Graves Commission – films that sought to reach a wider public with the authorization to screen to children and young people.

After the end of the war educational and instructional films in both German states were still distributed in 16 mm format. They were primarily released without sound; some of them as films from the Nazi period that were censored or considered harmless, others as silent new productions (Hackbarth and Schulz 1997). Since educational films were exclusively delivered as silent films in Germany until 1945 and therefore mainly 16 mm silent film projectors were available after the end of the war, the Americans felt obliged to bring large quantities of 16 mm sound projectors into their zone after the war (Schläger 1947, 3).

In 1947, the first delivery of 570 modern American Natco projectors for 16 mm sound film arrived; they were used in schools, but also in adult

6 Here and elsewhere according to their own accounts.

education and youth care. In addition, an initial shipment of seventy-five American documentary films was sent to spread “democratic ideas.” These films were distributed noncommercially in German-dubbed versions. However, new models of transportable 16 mm sound film projectors soon came onto the market in both German states. In West Germany, this was particularly the Siemens 2000 for optical sound film or for optical and magnetic sound, which was offered from 1951. In the GDR, VEB Carl Zeiss Jena built the TK 16 sound projector for schools and semi-professional users (Enz 1999–2000, 26–27).

The Institut für Unterrichtsfilm (Institute for Educational Film), which was founded in 1945 and changed its name in 1950 to the Institut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht (FWU, Institute for Film and Image in Science and Education), soon switched to producing sound films. Alongside their own productions, such as their first educational film, *Neuzeitliche Moorkultivierung* (Modern peatland cultivation, dir. Willi Mohaupt, GER-West, 1947) (Mohaupt 1948a and 1948b), shot on 35 mm sound film, the FWU also bought a number of films recorded on 35 mm for the supporting programs in cinemas, then transferred them either entirely or in an edited version onto 16 mm to distribute them. In the GDR the Zentralinstitut für Film und Bild in Unterricht, Erziehung und Wissenschaft (ZFB, Central Institute for Film and Image in Teaching, Education, and Science) and its follow-on institution the Deutsches Zentralinstitut für Lehrmittel (DZL, German Central Institute for Teaching Materials) also distributed their films on 16 mm, although still largely in silent prints.

The comprehensive film holdings of the Western victorious powers, particularly those from the US Information Service, Interfilm Hamburg, and the French Filmothek in Mainz, appeared primarily as 16 mm sound films. In addition, the German Railway, German Post, and the Land- und hauswirtschaftlicher Auswertungs- und Informationsdienst (AID, Agricultural and Domestic Evaluation and Counseling Service) distributed their informational, educational, and advertising films on 16 mm; even tourism advertisements, for instance, from Austria and Switzerland, as well as the PR films of large companies, came out on 16 mm. These films were often provided at no charge or with very low rental fees.

In West Germany there was also a series of films that were not directly meant for the public, but as documents for the communal archive. Larger cities used these to record their reconstruction work for posterity, such as Pforzheim in the two-part silent film *Neues Leben. Ausschnitte vom Wiederaufbau der “Goldstadt” Pforzheim und ihrer Industrie* (New life: Details of the reconstruction of the “golden city” Pforzheim and its industry, FRG,

1954)<sup>7</sup> or Heilbronn in the also silent film document *Wiederaufbau der Stadt Heilbronn* (Reconstruction of the city of Heilbronn, FRG, 1949–57), which recorded the construction progress in the city in numerous episodes such as *Unser Rathaus* (Our city hall).<sup>8</sup>

Projectors for 16 mm films were easy to transport and could be set up almost anywhere outside of commercial cinemas, even in larger halls. Film screenings were now also possible in small towns without cinemas and in rural areas. At the same time, this made it possible to reach groups of viewers who had previously not or only rarely attended film screenings. What's more, through targeted advertising measures, the organizers were able to ensure that the film screenings essentially reached the desired target audience. In the production years 1951–52, black-and-white feature films on 35 mm cost an average of DM 772,000; color films DM 1,290,000 (filmblätter 1953, 586). In 1960, Hilmar Hoffmann quoted costs of DM 20,000 to DM 50,000 for black-and-white films with a supporting program length of around fifteen minutes and between DM 30,000 and DM 90,000 for color films (Hoffmann 1960, 34). The costs for mass prints on 16 mm were relatively low. The Federal Press Office paid DM 2,512.72 for thirty 16 mm copies of the black-and-white film ... *weil es vernünftig ist* (... because it makes sense, dir. Rolf Vogel, FRG, 1960) for noncommercial use to support the propagandistic tasks and goals of the federal government. The production of the film on 35 mm had cost DM 15,577.83.<sup>9</sup>

## Cameras

In the first decade following the war, documentary filmmakers in both German states were still working with the 35 mm equipment that had been introduced before the end of the war. Alongside tripod-mounted cameras like the Askania Z from the Berlin Askania factory (starting in 1931) and the numerous variants of the French Debrie, they were also shot with the mirror-reflex hand camera Arriflex 35, which had been developed in 1937: “The Arriflex camera was an essential motor of the postwar German film industry, above all in the area of cultural and documentary films. Anyone who possessed an Arriflex camera already had the most important basis for a film production company” (Lusznat n.d.).

7 Film available at <https://www.filmportal.de/node/1733269/video/1733268> [part 1], <https://www.filmportal.de/node/1733271/video/1733270> [part 2].

8 Film available at <https://www.filmportal.de/node/18079/video/1733240>.

9 BArch (German Federal Archives) B 145-2875.

In the 16 mm area, two new handheld cameras came out in 1952, both with three-part lens turrets: the AK 16 from Zeiss Ikon in Dresden and the Arriflex 16 with a mirror-reflex device from Arnold & Richter in Munich; they were also used in television journalism. For outdoor shots, they facilitated a greater mobility and proximity, allowing for the reduction of extravagant constructions, lighting, and tracks, and thus making the productions cheaper.

Reportage elements, however, were introduced only slowly into the documentaries destined for the cinema. Which films were shot with which cameras can hardly be ascertained, even to this day (Bolbrinker 2005, 32).

As it had been in the 1920s and 1930s, documentary film continued to be a field of experimentation for technological innovations in cinema, for instance, with the introduction of telephoto lenses in expedition or animal films, or through experiments with new film materials such as Kodak's Tri-X-Film, on which cameraman Gerd Beissert shot the nighttime footage in 1955 for *Der nackte Morgen* (Naked morning, dir. Peter Pewas, FRG, 1956) (Beissert 1955, 229–30).<sup>10</sup>

During the first ten years of peace, documentaries were almost always shot without sound, which was added later in postproduction. The soundtrack of documentaries from those years consisted mostly of off-screen commentary and background music that was newly composed for each film; only rarely were original sound or noises from the sound archive used. This led to the impression that the films were all more or less similar. In 1954 technicians from Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR, Northwest German Broadcasting) joined an Arriflex 16 ST with the Maihak tape recorder MMK3 for cameraman Carsten Diercks, thus making it possible to record a dance synchronously in a reportage from Africa (Diercks 2000, 29f.). This experiment with the synchronous recording of image and sound with a pilot tone, however, was no longer used and thus had no effect yet on film aesthetics.

Not only were the speakers in documentary films almost always men, but most people working in the film industry were men, with only very few exceptions. Many small productions, however, could only survive financially due to the unpaid labor of family members, usually wives.

## Color Comes to Documentary Cinema

At the beginning of the 1950s only a few documentaries were made in color. In the Soviet occupation zone in Germany there is evidence of the popular

10 Peter Pewas: *Filme 1932–67*, DVD, Absolut: Medien, 2011.

science film *Ein Männlein steht im Walde* (A little man standing in the woods, DEFA-Kulturfilmproduktion, Soviet occupation zone in Germany, 1947) about the world of mushrooms, shot in Agfacolor and made by the Stammwerk in Wolfen. It was not until 1950 that two more color documentaries came out in the cinemas—the propagandistic *Neues Deutschland* (New Germany, dir. Bruno Kleberg, GDR, 1950), about the first year of the GDR, and *Immer bereit* (Always ready, dir. Kurt Maetzig and Feodor Pappe, GDR, 1950), about the first meeting of the Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ, Free German Youth) in Berlin. DEFA primarily used color film to “truthfully” represent “the new life of the German Democratic Republic with great persuasive power” (Ewald 1950). The six color films made in 1951 once again deal with socially significant and politically desirable topics, such as the visit of the State Puppet Theater of the USSR in *Gäste aus Moskau* (Guests from Moscow, dir. Gerhard Klein, GDR, 1951). Starting in 1952 the number of color documentaries gradually increased; with titles such as *Sommer im Spreewald* (Summer in the Spreewald, dir. Erich Barthel, GDR, 1953),<sup>11</sup> *Eine Modeplauderei* (Chatting about fashion, dir. Max Jaap, GDR, 1954),<sup>12</sup> about fashion in the GDR, and *Unser Erzgebirge* (Our ore mountains, dir. Erich Barthel, GDR, 1954)<sup>13</sup> now expanding the spectrum of topics. By 1955 eighteen color documentaries had been completed. Numerous medical training films were already produced in color.

One of the first documentaries shot in color in West Germany was the short film *Natur und Energie in Harmonie* (Nature and energy in harmony, dir. Erichhans Foerster, FRG, 1950), which was approved by the FSK on November 13, 1950. The use of the expensive color film stock was possible thanks to the active support of the Bavarian hydro stations, and the film was meant to show “that hydro power plants need not intervene in nature in a disruptive manner, but on the contrary contribute to elevating the overall agricultural picture” (Rationalisierungs-Gemeinschaft “Bauwesen” im RKW 1960, 23). At first the films were shot on Agfacolor from Wolfen, before switching to Eastmancolor. Only in 1951 did production of Agfacolor begin in Leverkusen.

In 1951 three other color films were produced for supporting programs, two landscape films and a study about figure skating. The following year there were already eleven more on various topics, including the two longer commercial films *Herr über das Unkraut* (Lord over the weeds, dir. Svend

11 Film available at <https://progress.film/> (registration required).

12 Film available at <https://progress.film/> (registration required).

13 Film available at <https://progress.film/> (registration required).

Noldan, FRG, 1952) by BASF and *Das Werk am Rhein* (The factory on the Rhein, dir. Karl G'schrey, FRG, 1952) about the Bayer factory in Leverkusen. Among the twenty-two color documentaries that came out in 1953—including both short films as well as mid-length industrial films—is the first feature-length documentary in color (Agfacolor), the mountain film *Nanga Parbat* (dir. Hans Ertl, FRG, 1953).<sup>14</sup> Starting in the mid-1950s color was gradually established in West German documentaries; the number of color documentaries rose from twenty-six in 1954 to sixty-two in 1955.

### Amateur Filmmakers Show Their Everyday Lives

The amateur filmmakers organized into the Bund Deutscher Film-Amateure (BDFa, Association of German Film Amateurs) also produced numerous documentaries (Goergen 2024). Their 8 mm or 16 mm films were recorded without sound, but were almost always provided with a musical soundtrack and commentary from a tape recorder. These works, however, only rarely reached an audience outside of the film clubs and national and international competitions. From the immediate postwar period in the western zones we can mention *Schöneberg baut auf. Ein Querschnitt unseres Lebens 1946* (Schöneberg is building: A cross-section of our life, GER-West, 1946) by the Berlin actor Herbert Kiper (1947) and the semi-professional works of Elisabeth Wilms such as *Alltag nach dem Krieg* (Everyday life after the war, GER-West, 1948) (Landschaftsverband WestfalenLippe 2001; Stark 2023).<sup>15</sup> There was a local audience for the 8 mm film *Freiburg im Breisgau 1940–50* (FRG, 1950)<sup>16</sup> by Rudolf Langwieler, which showed not only the undestroyed city, but also a nighttime air raid, ruins, and the first efforts toward reconstruction (Goergen 2022). In Stuttgart an amateur followed the construction of an eight-floor office building in *Neubau Jägerstraße* (New building on Jägerstrasse, Film-Amateur-Club Stuttgart, FRG, c. 1953).

The former bourgeois amateur film culture also continued in the GDR (Forster 2018, 74ff.). In 1950 Horst Butter, solo bass singer at the Berlin Staatsoper, shot the 8 mm home movie *Berlin 1950. Ein Spaziergang durch die Trümmer der Stadt* (Berlin 1950: A walk through the rubble of the city,

14 Film available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xz5kOQWg7Vs> (here only in black-and-white).

15 *Erich, lass mal laufen! Die Filme der Elisabeth Wilms*, DVD. Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, 2001.

16 Film available at <https://www.filmportal.de/node/1732600/video/1732602>; [https://rhinedits.ustrasbg.fr/w/index.php/TITEL\\_\(LFS02301\\_2\)](https://rhinedits.ustrasbg.fr/w/index.php/TITEL_(LFS02301_2)).



dir. Horst Butter, GDR, 1950) (Forster 2018, 96, 490). Working with other amateurs, the optician Joachim Steudel filmed the 16 mm sound film-reportage *Prenzlau baut auf* (Prenzlau is building, GDR, 1954) (Weinhold 2003). At the beginning of 1951 the amateur film groups in the GDR came together under the umbrella of the Kulturbund der DDR, an official cultural association in the GDR (DEFA-Stiftung n.d.a). The children's and youth film studios set up starting in 1951 can be seen as a special feature, as well as company film studios, such as the ones set up at the Leuna factories or at the VEB Electrochemical Combine Bitterfeld (EKB). They primarily worked in the documentary field with 16 mm equipment provided by the companies. In 1952 the short film *Einweihung Brückenbau Kleinkoschen 1952* (Inaugurating the construction of the bridge at Kleinkoschen, GDR, 1952) was made at the Braunkohlekombinat Senftenberg (Forster 2018, 140, 491). One year later the FDJ Film Studio at VEB Zeiss Ikon Dresden released the around-40-minute silent report *Die aktuelle Monatsschau vom 18.12. bis 21.12.1953* (Current events of the month from December 18 to 21, 1953, FDJ-Filmstudio des VEB Zeiss Ikon Dresden, GDR, 1953) about current events in the business (Forster 2018, 351ff., 488). Until 1955, however, very few films were produced in the company film studios.

## Censorship

Both the FSK and the FBW practiced de facto censorship by requiring cuts for their ratings. The more well-known was the temporary ban on the compilation film *Bis fünfnach zwölf* (From five to twelve, dir. Richard von Schenk, FRG, 1953) on the history of National Socialism, which elicited a wide public discussion on film censorship (Kniep 2010, 104ff.).<sup>17</sup> For the travel documentary *Jugoslawien* (Yugoslavia, dir. Wilhelm Hellmann, FRG, Yugoslavia, 1954) the FSK demanded the removal of a "horrible scream" in a scene where a wall with bricked-in skulls can be seen.<sup>18</sup> For *Das Wunder des Films* (The miracle of film, dir. Ekkehard Scheven, FRG, 1955), about the production conditions involved in filmmaking, FSK made a cut of a semi-close-up shot of a naked female breast a condition of approval.<sup>19</sup> In the Soviet occupation zone in Germany and the GDR it was first the Soviet military

17 *Bis fünfnach zwölf. Ein einmaliges Dokument der Zeitgeschichte*, DVD, marketing-film 2003.

18 Archiv der Freiwilligen Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft, Wiesbaden, Prüfunterlagen nr. 873.

19 Archiv der Freiwilligen Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft, Wiesbaden, Prüfunterlagen nr. 10053.

administration that functioned as a censoring body, followed by the State Committee for Film and finally, starting in January 1954, by the Ministry of Culture. *Der 13. Oktober* (The 13th of October, dir. Andrew Thorndike, GDR, 1949),<sup>20</sup> for instance, about Adolf Hennecke and the activist movement, was re-edited under pressure from the Soviet authorities (Jordan 1995, 58f.).

## Broad-based Reception

Just as it is nearly impossible to determine a reliable number of documentary films screened in both German states in the first postwar decade, it is equally difficult to say much about their distribution. Most spectators must have come across them in the cinema, whether as short films in a supporting program or as feature-length films, usually in matinee screenings, which could count on an audience that was interested in culture and loyal. Even a few industrial films on 35 mm found their way into the commercial cinema by means of special events; these, however, were primarily shown in narrow-gauge format and internally as part of social support, further education, or as advertisement (K. J. [Kurt Johanning] 1954). The *Aktualitätenkinos* (newsreel cinemas) set up near train stations in West Germany filled their hourly programs mainly with short documentaries and newsreels. Numerous distributors, such as Filmdienst für Jugend und Volksbildung, Land- und hauswirtschaftlicher Auswertungs- und Informationsdienst (AID), Landesfilmdienste, Katholisches Filmwerk, and Evangelischer Filmdienst, the film services of large companies such as the German Railway, BASF, Esso, and Volkswagen, as well as embassies approached noncommercial distributors. The preeminent force in the dissemination of industrial films was above all the film service of the Rationalisierungskuratorium der Deutschen Wirtschaft (RKW, Rationalization Board of the German Economy) (Holz 1954). Unfortunately, there are hardly any reports about how screenings were experienced in the extraordinarily wide noncommercial sector (Goergen 2016). The offerings of the British Zonal Film Library, for instance, were widely used “above all by schools, hospitals, youth groups, and women’s organization and other cultural establishments” (Clemens 1997, 186). These and numerous other organizations such as trade unions, churches, and political parties, but also cultural associations and schools, were the principal borrowers, but also early television made use of short documentaries, usually unannounced, as filler material.

20 Film available at <https://progress.film/> (registration required).

## Newsreels in the Occupation Zones after 1945

As Jeanpaul Goergen has explained, there were a number of challenges facing the restart of documentary film production in West Germany. Alongside the problems of licensing by the victorious powers and access to film stock, there was above all a lack of will to make a new start, as Matthias Steinle states in an analysis of the short cultural film production in the 1950s:

Much more serious was – firstly – a certain aesthetic and content-related insecurity on the part of the filmmakers and – secondly – the economic fragility of the production context. These two motifs were to shadow documentary film in West Germany as a constant crisis scenario and lament. (Steinle 2009, 278)

The unbroken continuity also characterized newsreel production. The coverage in the newsreels, however, differed fundamentally from the treatment in cultural and documentary films. It was marked by the pressure of timeliness and treated its subjects in brief segments of around one minute in length. While those who made documentary productions took a long time to familiarize themselves with a topic, researching it, and then shooting and editing for weeks, a newsreel subject treated only one topic and often had just a few hours time to do so. Some topics, however, were returned to, and the development of a process could thus be traced over several weeks in various episodes. Newsreels have a long tradition in Germany. Starting in 1910 the French production company Pathé delivered its *Pathé Journal* to German motion-picture theaters. On November 15, 1911, the Freiburg production company Express Films released *Der Tag im Film* (The day in film), the first daily cinematic news coverage in Germany in the cinema (Jung 2005, 191f.) and assembled a large network of correspondents. In 1913 the *Eiko Week* and in October 1914 the *Messter Week* appeared as additional German newsreels. A large variety of newsreel enterprises appeared in the 1920s and 1930s, but they nonetheless did not produce a large number of prints since the newsreels were screened for up to sixteen weeks at a time. The start of the war saw the National Socialists concentrate newsreel production in the form of *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* (The German newsreel). This happened through the consolidation of the four existing newsreels (UFA, Tobis, Deulig, Fox) at the time of the attack on Poland in September 1939, but formally the merger took place in June 1940, as evidenced by the appearance of a unified title sequence under the *Reichsadler* symbol (Hoffmann 2005a, 230; Hoffmann 2005b, 669ff.).

At the end of the war in 1945, the Allies initially produced their own newsreels in all four occupation zones, for they wanted to keep information under their own control. As Bernd Kleinhans pointed out: “Above all it was a matter of informing the population as quickly as possible with newsreels, which were expected to have a particular influence on the attitudes of the population” (Kleinhans 2013, 285). Documentaries and newsreels were introduced in order to liberate “the German spirit from the National Socialist enslavement and military doctrine,” as can be read in a confidential memorandum by the British Office of War Information on March 27, 1945 (Gröschl 1997, 140). The medium of the newsreel was thus meant to re-educate the population, without losing the acceptance of the newsreel among them. The original idea of a jointly produced newsreel for all four occupation zones, which the French and Soviet representatives were also initially open to, could not be realized (Gröschl 1997, 139ff.).

### The American–British *Welt im Film*

In May 1945 the Americans and the British, encouraged by General McClure, held test screenings in Hamburg and Erlangen cinemas with subjects from British and American newsreels as well as Allied feature films and documentaries. The audience was surveyed using questionnaires from the American Intelligence Section (Gröschl 1997, 147f.). The results led to the development of their own newsreel series *Welt im Film* (The world in film) for the zones under their control, which was first produced in London and then between September 1945 and June 1952 in the Geiseltasteig Studios in Munich (Menardi 2022, 85). Initially presented in English with German subtitles, starting on July 30, 1945, they appeared in a German-language version. By May 1947 around 2,000 cinemas had reopened and were showing *Welt im Film* as a part of the supporting program. Until 1949 there were problems with timely delivery to the cinemas. For communities without a permanent cinema, mobile screening technology was introduced (Gröschl 1997, 149f.).

*Welt im Film* stood under the organizational direction of the American Sam K. Winston and the editorial direction of the Briton George F. Salmony. In Gasteig Germans were hired as narrators, editors, and technicians. Alongside subjects on German events that they shot themselves, international segments were contributed by newsreel companies from the US and Great Britain. Other than political information and documentary footage, a third of the time was given over to entertainment and sports. An edition covered around ten subjects, which were announced by an intertitle. The editing followed



Figure 2.3. Poster of *Welt im Film* newsreel no. 187/1948, Foto: HDF.

international standards with quick cuts, sometimes bombastic music, and pithy narrators. According to Bernd Kleinhaus, “[t]he *Welt im Film* was, on the one hand, a modern Western newsreel, but, on the other hand, it could link back to the viewing habits of an audience shaped by the last Nazi newsreels” (Kleinhaus 2013, 291). Interest among the German population increased. In a survey from 1946 only 10 percent were satisfied with *Welt im Film*, but by 1948 this had risen to 65 percent (Merritt and Merritt 1970, 232f.).

The newsreel was meant to help reconstruction and democratization by showing Great Britain and the US as role models, but successful examples

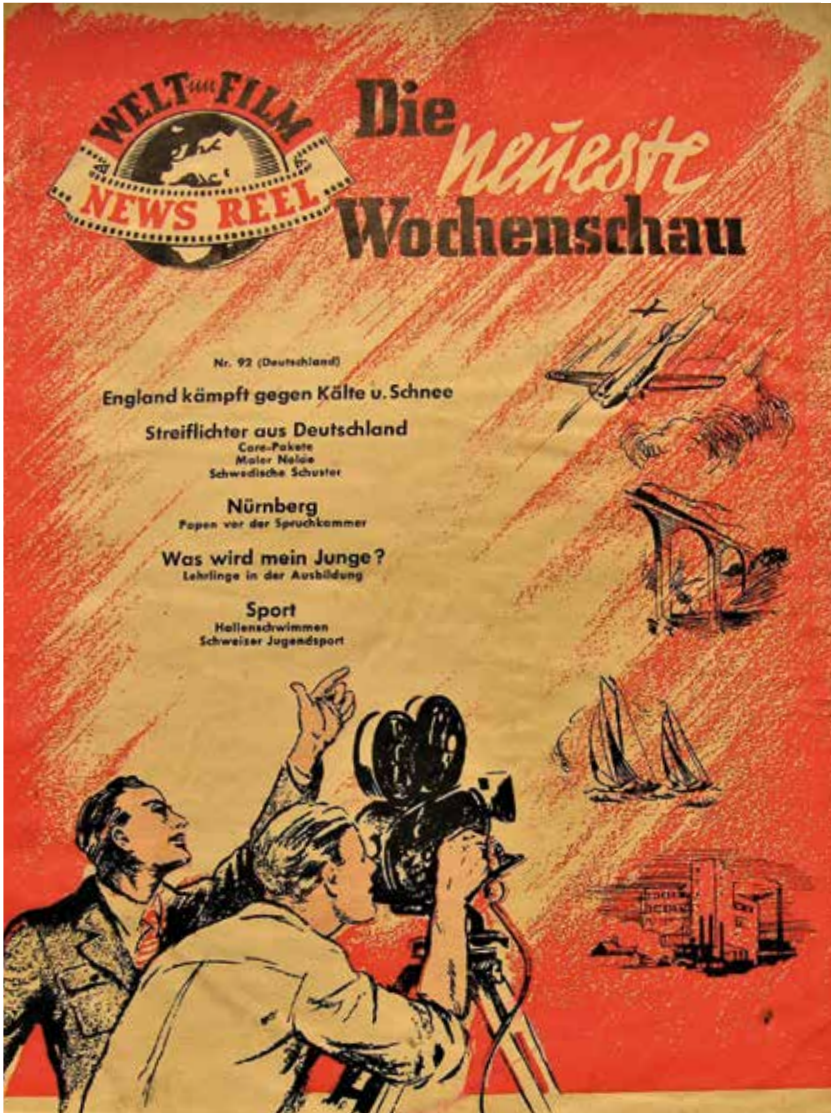


Figure 2.4. Poster of *Welt im Film* newsreel no. 92/1947, Foto: HDF.

from the occupation zones were also shown—with the exception of the Soviet occupation zone, which appeared only rarely. Jutta Gröschl related it to the American help: “Starting in mid-1948 the aid efforts and positive economic influence of the American European Recovering Program were represented in individual economic reports” (Gröschl 1997, 149f.). In an article in *Die Neue Filmwoche* in 1948 on the three-year existence of *Welt im Film*, the call for German professionals to take over the newsreel was mentioned:

The film control office cannot, however, meet this understandable request, since the question of acquiring film stock continues to be so difficult that it is hardly possible to produce a newsreel without the support of the occupying powers. Furthermore, there is currently in Germany a lack of the necessary connections to foreign countries. (Die Neue Filmwoche 1948)

The American military administration described the distribution of the newsreels a highly profitable undertaking. Between July and November of 1949 *Welt im Film* took in nearly DM 1.5 million in the American sector alone (Gröschl 1997, 154). The Americans in particular wanted to maintain control over this medium. In contrast, starting in autumn 1948 the British were prepared to divest from it and 1949 they did indeed withdraw. The Americans continued to run the newsreel until it was privatized. In July 1952 *Welt im Film* was taken over by the Neue Deutsche Wochenschau GmbH and continued as *Welt im Bild* (The world in pictures).

### The French *Blick in die Welt*

In the French-controlled zone many of the movie houses had been destroyed, and films were initially shown by mobile cinemas. The medium of film and in particular the newsreel were seen as an important instrument to influence the German population, and therefore cinemas were rebuilt as a priority (Thaisy 2006). By the beginning of 1946 many venues were reopened, which mostly screened French films with German subtitles as well as German productions that were judged to be unobjectionable. Starting in August of 1945 a German-dubbed version of the *Les Actualités Françaises* newsreel was compiled in Paris every week and approved in Baden-Baden to be shown in the French occupation zone; the cinemas were supplied with forty-five prints. The commentary in the newsreels was an important stylistic device (Lindeperg 2000). Jutta Gröschl argues, that

[t]he goal of the translated newsreels was to provide the German population access to “l’actualité internationale par l’image” in order to expand the Germans’ perspective. The reports were thus meant to convey the most objective viewpoint possible and to reflect democratic principles,

as was written in a report by the French Information Direction (Gröschl 1997, 165f.). If this newsreel was initially very much oriented to events in

France, this changed in the summer of 1946 according to an article in *Die Neue Filmwoche*:

In the context of the French newsreels, more and more images from the French occupation zone will be shown in the future. German cameramen are engaged to film daily events from politics, sports, or culture for the newsreels or to capture interesting moments from daily life in the French zone. (Die Neue Filmwoche 1946)

This was a reaction to the low interest in these newsreels. A branch was opened in Berlin and arranged a newsreel exchange with DEFA, which was never realized in practice, however.

In the autumn of 1946, the French government decided to produce a newsreel specifically made for the French occupation zone in Germany. To achieve this a French–German International Film Alliance was founded in Baden-Baden with eighty employees, whose subsidiary, Filmwochenschau GmbH *Blick in die Welt* (View on the world), put out a newsreel of the same name. Les Actualités Françaises maintained 90 percent of the company and the German Alfa Films kept the remaining 10 percent. “The new newsreel now engaged five cameramen in the French zone, two in Berlin and one in the city of Hamburg in the British area” (Gröschl 1997, 171). This newsreel had a monopoly position in the French zone, which was also maintained against other companies like Metro–Goldwyn–Mayer. *Blick in die Welt* was meant to help re-orient the German population in a democratic direction, showing France as the model to follow. It was the French government’s mouthpiece and there was no attempt to disguise this. In 1948 the reporting from *Blick in die Welt* shifted to the economic reconstruction of West Germany, which was recognized with optimistic features such as covering the reconstruction of bridges. An important element of each episode was reporting on sports events. After the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, it was taken over by Deutsche Wochenschau *Blick in die Welt* GmbH, which produced more than 2,000 episodes of the newsreel *Blick in die Welt* as a joint French–German undertaking until 1986—and which have since been put online (Progress Film n.d.).

### **Soviet Influenced: *Der Augenzeuge***

In the Soviet occupation zone newsreels were initially screened in their original versions mainly for the Soviet soldiers. The film studios had



largely been preserved, which in principle could have provided the basis for resuming production. However, the Soviets first dismantled the technical film equipment and had it transported eastwards. Of the sixty cinemas originally in Berlin, only twenty-two of them were in operation after the end of the war (Spiker 1975, 240), where Soviet documentaries and feature films were shown, along with the newsreel *Nowosti dnja* (News of the day). Starting in June 1945 the requirements for dubbing into German were set up in the Tobis Studios in Berlin-Johannisthal. After the division of Berlin into the four sectors on July 12, 1945, the reconstruction of film facilities was actively begun, and in October 1945 the construction of a German-Soviet film production company was authorized, of which the Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (SMAD, Soviet Military Administration in Germany) sought to maintain control over censorship and distribution through Sojusintorgkino. Filmaktiv was founded, which made an inventory and prepared for the creation of a production company. Starting on January 2, 1946, 127 German employees were working there, and along with the initial capital, the Soviets also provided film material. "For instance, 12,000 meters of film stock and 50,000 Reichsmarks were made available to the nineteen employees in the newsreel division, led by Dr. Kurt Maetzig" (Gröschl 1997, 184). After the official founding of DEFA, the number of employees rose to sixty persons at *Der Augenzeuge* (The eyewitness).<sup>21</sup> Of the around forty cameramen in the first years, a little less than a third of them were employed at the propaganda companies of *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* (The German newsreel) (Mückenberger and Jordan 1994, 206). The head cameraman was Heinz von Jaworsky, who also had a Nazi past. Despite the support of the SMAD there was a lack of technical equipment and automobiles. Starting on February 15, 1946, the newsreel *Der Augenzeuge*, which was initially produced monthly, was shown in the cinemas in the Soviet occupation zone in Germany. Between March and July of 1946 *Der Augenzeuge* appeared every two weeks, and only in August did it go to weekly. On May 17, 1946, SMAD formally handed the license over to DEFA. In contrast to Nazi propaganda, Kurt Maetzig called for a return to the unbiased, objective, and truthful representation of social reality in the newsreel.

One thing was obvious to the founders and employees, namely, that the new newsreel would be in radical opposition to the Nazi newsreel, which had deceived the public about the reality of the situation up until the last

21 Biographies of the staff members can be found in Mückenberger and Jordan 1994, 201--208.

weeks of the war with its slogans of war, victory, and perseverance, and had poisoned public opinion. (Maetzig 1995, 32)

This was reflected in the motto of *Der Augenzeuge* suggested by Marion Keller: “Sie sehen selbst, Sie hören selbst, urteilen Sie selbst” (“See for yourself, hear for yourself, judge for yourself”). The audience was meant to be encouraged to think on their own. It was not meant to be a sequence of events, but a well-thought-out and artistically designed construction. When Kurt Maetzig turned his attention back to feature films, Marion Keller took over managing the newsreel. Until the summer of 1947 DEFA produced five feature films, sixteen documentary and educational films, and fifty-six newsreels, as the DEFA director Alfred Lindemann explained at the First Congress of German Filmmakers, which took place in June 1947 at the invitation of DEFA in Berlin (Lindemann 1947, 13). The motto preceded every newsreel up until episode no. 34/1949, and stood for a certain pluralism of opinions and also a potential critique of undesirable social developments.

In no. 174/1947, SMAD ordered the Brandenburg state government to hand over the UFA film studio in Babelsberg “for the purpose of satisfying the USSR’s reparation claims from German ownership.” The Soviet Technical Office for Cinematography took control of the studio (DEFA-Stiftung n.d.b). But they strongly supported the start of film production in the GDR.

From mid-1948, the SED leadership exerted an increasingly strong influence on the editors of *Der Augenzeuge*, not necessarily to show reality with problems, but rather socialist ideals. In retrospect, the DEFA propagandist Andrew Thorndike commented on this shift in direction of DEFA documentaries as follows:

It was vital for employees to take a position on constructing a new society. And in doing so one had the fortunate feeling that documentary film was highly appreciated and that its role in forming consciousness had full social recognition. We had to consider our choice of material very carefully, as well as the dramaturgy and function of our films. The documentary was meant to search out the new man and to draw attention to his struggle for a new, peaceful future, guided by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. We couldn’t allow ourselves to depict things as they were, that would have seemed sad. (Herlinghaus 1982, 102f.)

The style of *Der Augenzeuge* was dominated by an ideologically oriented commentary; sometimes there were also attempts at witty comments that directly addressed the audience. There was no particular significance given

to either the images or the music. This is also why Heinz Kersten, in his study on film in the Soviet occupation zone, described *Der Augenzeuge* as “the dulllest of all newsreels” (Kersten 1954, 8). Using the example of rebuilding the economy, Jutta Gröschl wrote:

But while the motto “We’re moving on” was epitomized in the Western newsreels through the visual representation of modern production facilities and countless industrial goods, *Der Augenzeuge* featured the individual worker, “creating with his hands.” This emphasized the idea that each person and the efforts he brought to his place was contributing to supply and reconstruction. (Gröschl 1997, 200)

### **The American *Fox Tönende Wochenschau***

In May 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany was founded, thus changing the conditions for media production, which was no longer controlled by the three Western occupying powers. The American *Fox Tönende Wochenschau* (Fox Movietone newsreel) existed in Germany before 1939, and starting in December 1949 it returned to its prewar practice. The studio 20th Century Fox produced a total of eight newsreels worldwide, and could therefore rely on a large network of correspondents. They promoted themselves to the cinema owners with this internationalism and the actuality of the reports. It was a privately owned enterprise, thus aimed at making money, and it sought to ensure its market share through a favorable price. This newsreel therefore focused on sensational events, exclusive topics, and entertainment. The German editorial office was located in Frankfurt and West German cinemas were provided with the *Fox Tönende Wochenschau* until 1978.

### **West German *Neue Deutsche Wochenschau***

The Adenauer government was very interested in there being a West German newsreel that would put its politics in a positive light. It therefore took a stake, along with the city of Hamburg, in the production company Neue Deutsche Wochenschau GmbH (New German Newsreel), which produced a newsreel by the same name.

The independence of the newsreel was meant to be guaranteed by an administrative board. It included fifteen representatives from the parties,

the financiers, and important organizations: from the Olympic Committee, the Film Rating Board, the Nordwestdeutschen Rundfunk; the chair of the board was held by the Hamburg cultural senator Heinrich Landahl (SPD). (Paschen 2010, 24)

On the one hand, the employees were meant to be politically unencumbered; on the other hand, there was a need for experienced specialists. The editor-in-chief was initially Heinrich Roellenbleg, who had been the director of *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* during the Nazi period. Following public protests he was let go after a few months (Lehnert 2013, 98). Also active at the beginning was Max Winkler, who had an incriminating Nazi past, too, but remained in the background. The head cameraman was Erich Stoll, who also had a Nazi past and who was thus let go in the autumn of 1946 by the British-American newsreel *Welt im Film* when it was revealed that he had taken part in the anti-Semitic propaganda film *Der ewige Jude* (The eternal Jew, dir. Fritz Hippler, DE, 1940) (Kleinhans 2013, 288) as well as his leading role in the footage taken of the People's Court trial of the participants of the plot of July 20, 1944, and the execution of the plotters. In spite of this, he later worked with various other newsreels, and between 1950 and 1960 was head cameraman at the *Neue Deutsche Wochenschau* (Filmportal n.d.). In order to cover West Germany, there were camera teams in Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, and Düsseldorf. In a conversation with Karl Stamm, newsreel cameraman Klaus Brandes confirmed that the shooting concept had been taken over from the Nazi newsreels, namely, first to establish the location with a long shot and then to go into detail shots (Stamm 2005, 11f.).

The first edition was released to West German cinemas on February 3, 1950. The aim was to create a West German newsreel that would present West Germany abroad as a peace-loving, democratic country, as Uta Schwarz (2002) has shown in her outstanding work on the newsreels of the 1950s. Each episode had an average of eight subjects and a total length of ten to twelve minutes, and was delivered to up to 250 cinemas. Commentary for newsreels as well as for documentary films after 1945 was generally recorded in the studio, while music and sounds were taken from the archive. Original sound was the exception, and usually this involved speeches by politicians, for instance in *Neue Deutsche Wochenschau* (NDW), no. 75/1951.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it was precisely these original recordings, made with much effort, that provided an authentic impression to the newsreels. They often focused on politicians commenting on the state of politics. By far the most frequently

22 Film available at <https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/32181/692960>

seen and heard in NDW was Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who had a total of 524 appearances in this newsreel between 1950 and 1964 (Schwarz 2002, 213ff.). The production was cost-intensive, at around DM 26,500 per episode, and did not make a profit (Lehnert 2013, 103f.). In the first year, NDW generated a loss of nearly DM 900,000, but this was reduced to nearly 200,000 by 1951, in part due to selling the news material to television, which was just emerging. The debts were assumed by the public sector. Since some NDW reports about the Bonn-based Adenauer government seemed too critical, the editor-in-chief Heinz Kuntze-Just, who had proposed the concept for this newsreel in 1949 along with the cameraman Erich Stoll, was let go in December 1952 on other pretexts (Paschen 2010, 29). In July 1953 the NDW took over *Welt im Bild*, which had previously been produced by the Americans, thus bringing two newsreels to the West German market, which together reached 800 copies per week at the peak of cinema. Both were under the influence of the German Press Office and were therefore aligned with the government's line. In addition, the production company received more and more commissions for image films from official bodies. After this newsreel enterprise nevertheless fell into financial difficulties, it was taken over in 1956 by the re-established UFA and starting in the summer of 1956 was continued as *UFA Wochenschau*. The *UFA Wochenschau* was made until January 1969, and its successor *UFA dabei* was produced until the end of 1977.

## Summary

In both German states, documentary film production was marked by a strong technical, aesthetic, and personnel continuity after 1945; it remained almost exclusively the domain of men. One of the few substantial changes was the increasing use of color film.

A small-scale producer scene developed in the western zones and the Federal Republic, as well as in West Berlin, which served all areas from full-length documentary films, short films for the supporting program in cinemas, educational and training films, archive films, to industrial and commercial film.

After a financially challenging new start, during which numerous newly founded companies were not able to maintain a market share, a series of leading medium-sized companies were formed, which were frequently joined by new, but usually short-lived, production firms. Commercial and numerous noncommercial distribution companies provided the documentaries to the cinemas and to other screening venues such as schools and club rooms. In

terms of content, the documentaries of the immediate postwar period were initially oriented towards the political guidelines of the victorious powers. After this ended, their thematic direction expanded, depending above all on the requirements and wishes of their commissioners. Aesthetically, there was a rapid shift away from the postulate of the “beautiful image” of the National Socialist documentary film and a new sobriety in design became widespread. Under the influence of American documentary film, many directors focused on stronger narrative elements and told their stories in the form of short, realistic fictional actions. In the feature-length documentary, on the other hand, there were no significant aesthetic changes, and also not in image film, which even explicitly referred back to the symphonic tradition of the acclaimed industrial films of the 1930s—especially those of Walter Ruttmann.

The GDR centralized documentary film production at DEFA and distribution via Progress Film Distribution. In both popular science and documentary films, SED imposed an orientation to current events and socialist ideals. Film aesthetics were based on Soviet models; fictional scenes in documentary films were rejected. Discussions about the visual design of documentary films, however, about how best to make an effect on moviegoers, were only held internally. In both German states private filmmakers as well as organized film amateurs made documentary films about their immediate surroundings.

The newsreels initially founded by the victorious powers also followed well-established concepts. As a rule, the episodes had a length of around ten minutes and contained a mixture of politics, sensation, entertainment, and sports. Individual segments continued to be exchanged internationally. The four newsreels in West Germany together produced 800 prints every week. In this they were the model for television reporting, and at the beginning they also provided television with material. Plans to switch to color failed due to the high cost of mass reproduction. The increasing spread of television as the new medium with daily reports on current events made the newsreels almost superfluous in both German states by the beginning of the 1960s; they therefore withdrew from political reportage and dedicated themselves more fully to entertaining subjects.

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### 3. Finding the Best Time for Shorts

Non-fiction Film, Non-stop Cinemas, and the Temporalities of Everyday Life of Post-WWII Audiences

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#### Abstract

Studies of the historical audience of non-fiction film are rather sporadic. This chapter focuses on a specific type of cinemas in which non-fiction films have predominated, the non-stop cinemas, and examines its importance in the period immediately after the end of World War II, when they satiated the interest of contemporary audiences in audiovisual information from around the world. Based on period surveys and oral history interviews, it seeks to reconstruct the role of the non-stop cinemas in the everyday life of postwar audiences. Highlighting the specificities of temporal openness and spatial accessibility, this text argues that non-stop cinemas were an important source of education and information for pre-TV audiences.

**Keywords:** everyday life, cinema audiences, moviegoing, film consumption, urban life, oral history

Whenever people talk about historical non-fiction film audiences, anecdotes of a similar nature always circulate about it—non-fiction films are not popular with viewers, people avoid them, deliberately skipping the pre-program, they go for a smoke, buy lemonade at the concession stand, and so on (Skalski 1955, 154). As Brian Winston has shown, however, there are two catches with the traditional interpretation of this “marginalized viewer.” Above all, the viewer is marginalized from the perspective of the operation of commercial cinemas, in which full-length entertainment programs have dominated since the 1910s. At the same time, various national cinemas, local legislation, and strategies of distribution and programming have

created different conditions for the acceptance (or non-acceptance) of a non-fiction film by a mass audience (Winston 2021). In addition, especially in the field of useful cinema or educational cinema, factual forms regularly appeared both in cinemas (but outside its commercial programming, or have played a specific role as the tax advantage for the whole program) and in nontheatrical venues (e.g., Wasson 2005; Acland and Wasson 2011; Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible 2012), as they were linked to forms of socialization other than purely entertaining ones.

The opinion about non-fiction films in the eyes of early post-WWII audiences was greatly complicated by the experience of war propaganda. The non-fiction film thus defended its devalued social role in an era in which government organizations, like many filmmakers, believed that the new documentary film would help build (and discipline) a new postwar society (Druick 2006; Bonifazio 2014). Apart from the distrust of political and explicitly re-educational films (Saryusz-Wolska 2015), other types of non-fiction genres found a regular audience. And, as we will see, it was an audience whose choice of non-fiction film was conscious, because the relationship to this kind of content could play a significant role in their everyday lives, in their individual life stories, or had a formative role in communities they belonged to.

Most studies to date address the historical audiences through distribution strategies and exhibition of films, emphasizing the spatial aspect of reception (Jancovich, Faire, and Subbings 2003; Treveri Gennari, Hipkins, and O'Rawe 2018; Aveyard and Moran 2013). At the same time, in this spatial approach, it is always necessary to take into account that the reception position of non-fiction film until at least the 1960s was conditioned by its predominantly short format. According to the Czechoslovak prewar director of military films Jiří Jeníček, the crucial defining feature of short films was their length, mirrored in a specific distribution logic. According to Jeníček, it is appropriate to call various factual forms (natural, ethnographic, social, and other) a "short film" because we can thus define their "mission, which they have in the time dimension of the usual cinema exhibition" (Jeníček 1940, 5). Jeníček and his colleagues viewed the "short film" (*Kurzfilm, court-métrage*) from the perspective of its distribution position in both temporal and spatial terms. For them, short films were films that, strictly speaking, were documentary, fictional, animated, or combined various methods, but that, precisely due to the ways they were distributed, were all perceived as educational in one way or another.

In a recent review of his own theory of the semio-pragmatic approach to film, Roger Odin proposes the concept of "spaces of communication," which

helps to specify the situational nature of the communication act (and the audience experience) in a specific, spatially defined context (Odin 2022, 69). For research into the spatial anchoring of short non-fiction film, it is particularly important that, according to Odin, certain spaces create specific conditions of expectation, namely, a “documentarizing” or “moralizing mode” of communication (Odin 2022, 81). Thus, although some short films use the narrative techniques of fiction, viewers expect information or values from them, usually because of the spatial context of their exhibition and consumption—for example, at school, or any other pedagogical or educational context (Masson 2012). Precisely because these spaces stimulate a documentarizing or moralizing mode of reception, we, therefore, encounter a more frequent rejection of newsreels or other factual films outside this type of environment—that is, where the viewer expects entertainment or a long dramatic experience. It is this disproportion, disadvantaging the newsreel and the short film in the eyes of the audience in cinematic “prime time,” that shows that the spatial context was significantly complemented by the temporal context of viewing, as it influences how people perceive the stages of the working or free day and how they think about what activities they do when.

In this text, I intend to link data on the distribution and exhibition of films with the memory of the film audience obtained from oral-historical research and with data from contemporary audience research to emphasize that it is necessary to ask both where and when the viewer was offered short non-fiction films and how they permeated people’s daily routines. I focus specifically on non-stop cinemas as prominent venues for non-fiction film exhibition and although my primary sources relate to the situation in Czechoslovakia, where generalizations are possible, I refer to the wider European context. I suggest, that if we start from the audience and take into account the often-neglected aspect of “shortness” in cinema-going choices, we will understand not only the role that non-fiction films played in the changing daily routines of postwar audiences, but also the more general reasons for the complex position of short non-fiction films in terms of programming and consumption.

### **Cinemas, Traffic, and Rhythms of Urban Postwar Life**

The nature of the “everyday” is often seen as elusive, because it is always unambiguously an individual action taking place in the habitual routines of our broader relationships and activities, happening uniquely but within

institutional frameworks of time and space (Chaney 2002; Bennett 2005). The ways in which our everyday time is organized are culturally determined at both individual and institutional levels (Hofstede 2000). The everyday life of ordinary people after the war was influenced to the greatest extent by their work involvement in reconstruction, and, therefore, especially by work-related temporality and routine (Wakeman 2012; Rákosník 2010).

During the first decade after the war, in view of the need to overcome the postwar crisis in Europe, there was no explicit political will to reduce working hours (Lee, McCann, and Messenger 2007). People had little free time, while the situation of women was even worse than men. One of the results of the tendency towards higher employment of women was more an increased burden in the home, which at the time already meant free time for men, as the participation of men in household tasks was minimal. As has been shown in the case of Italy, women often used the cinema as a babysitter, but if the nature of the children did not suit this practice, they considered the possibility of attending the cinema as mothers to be limited (Treveri Gennari, O'Rawe, and Hipkins 2011, 545). In general, the most important audience of the postwar era was youth. In France, for example, 43 percent of spectators were between fifteen and twenty-five years old. Based on their personal diaries, Delphine Chedaleux argues that, for these spectators, going to the cinema meant the conquest of "autonomous space," through which they could construct their individual identities (Chedaleux, Juan, and Pillard 2020).

Yet the 1950s are associated with the gradual expansion of leisure time as well as rising demands for the ability to spend the money earned through labor not only on products but also on entertainment, sports, or culture. The fear that leisure would become a vacuum or be suddenly filled with morally questionable activities, however, concurrently gave rise to various official tendencies to cultivate leisure, curb idleness, and direct leisure to education and self-development (De Grazia 2005, 345; Franc and Knapík 2014, 70–71). The possibilities of cultural consumption by different groups of people were thus influenced by the politics and organization of work in various professions, gender stereotypes in households, habits in the education of children and youth, and also ways of supporting various leisure organizations. All these frameworks can be considered as overlapping layers creating specific time and space orders.

As Henri Lefebvre states in his texts on the intersections of spatiality and temporality in social interaction: "Everywhere where there is an interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm" (Lefebvre 2004 [1992], 15). In their comments on the spatially conditioned

temporality of everyday life, Lefebvre and his partner Catherine Régulier thus emphasize the concept of rhythm, and through “rhythmanalysis” they attempt to articulate the essence of the rhythmic organization of everyday time, its constitutions and manifestations. Lefebvre and Régulier draw on the repetitive nature of the everyday, which is accentuated by various differences, take into account both personnel and external (social) rhythms, note the acquisition of social rhythms in the development of human life, and argue that “the everyday is the site of, the theater for, and what is at stake in a conflict between great indestructible rhythms and the processes imposed by the socioeconomic organization of production, consumption, circulation and habitat” (Lefebvre 2004 [1992], 73). Although they do not neglect to point out the rhythmic specifics of the rural space, at the center of their interest is the urban everyday, for which they also highlight the interconnectedness with the rhythms of the media.

The mediatised everyday, for them, is “simultaneously the prey of the media, used, misunderstood, simultaneously fashioned and ignored by these means that make the apparatuses” (Lefebvre 2004 [1992], 50). What is important about this concept of intermingling urban and media rhythms is that it perceives the presence of media in urban space as both continuous and fragmentary at every moment and that it takes into account the possibility of an individual choice of passing or exposure to mediality. From this rhythmic perspective on the postwar urban environment of cinema exhibition, it follows that the different types of cinema distribution and exhibition created different kinds of temporal orders and thus referred to different sociocultural habits and traditions.

While standard cinemas addressed their audiences in the early evening and in the evening, much like theaters, concert halls, and other traditional forms of culture or entertainment, for nontheatrical distribution the typical afternoon times were in line with the tradition of educational lecture activities. The temporal logic of the then fledgling film festivals, on the other hand, corresponded to the specifics of the regular celebrations repeated in the annual cycles. Non-stop cinemas, in addition, screened their programs in loops from morning to evening and offered open temporal arrangement corresponding to the “flow” typical of the media order of radio or television broadcasts. However, while the broadcasting media dispersed their reception environment most often to households, non-stop cinema remained a public institution of collective viewing, aligned in its temporal rhythm with everyday urban life. This set of characteristics makes non-stop cinemas an interesting example of an exhibition format that brings the reception of film closer to the modes of consumption of journalistic content and at



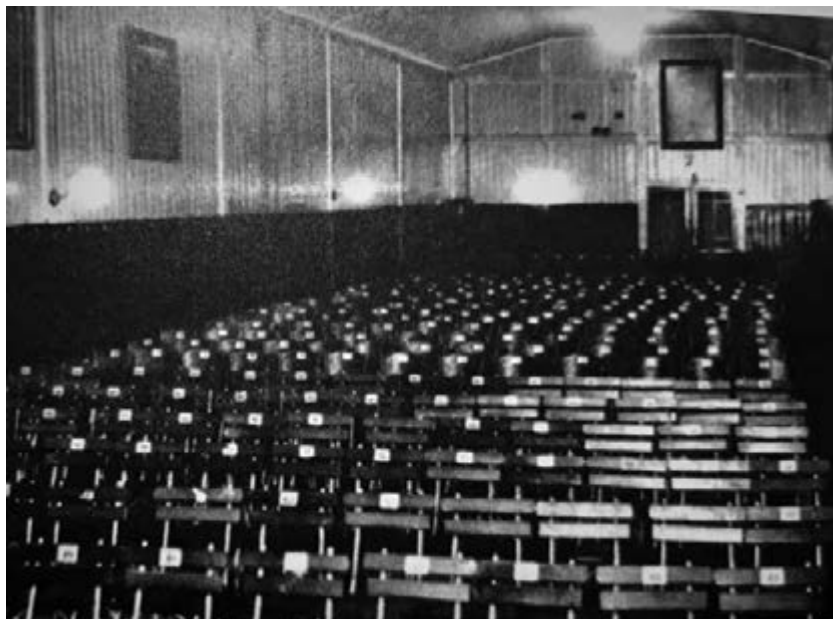


Figure 3.1. Lido-bio interior. Personal archive of the brothers Čvančara.

the same time represents a kind of transitional continuity between the cinematic and television eras.

This text is based on research into postwar non-fiction film culture in Czechoslovakia, while gesturing towards other European contexts, especially France, Germany, and Italy. These countries were definitely not the same; cinema, including non-fiction, had different traditions in them, and appealed to various groups of the population. National legislation also applied various degrees of support for the release of short films in commercial cinemas and was introduced in different years. In addition, national labor policies also responded differently to efforts to reduce working hours. On the most general level, however, we can say that viewers had similar opportunities to encounter non-fiction films. Short films were programmed as additions before the feature film, or appeared in thematic cycles, in clubs occupying both theatrical and nontheatrical venues, and in various educational settings, in museums, schools, etc.

Scientific, industrial, instructional, or promotional films entered professional environments of work, expert conferences, or exhibitions. With mobile projectors, films also entered various rural areas, but also homes and amateur circuits. The artistic value of films was negotiated at film festivals as ritualized events where film industry networks met behind the mediatised glamour of the red carpets. Also, so-called specialized cinemas

developed, of which the factual content was typical for non-stop cinemas, whose program consisted of newsreels and short films, often combined with cartoons. Viewers could thus be confronted with non-fiction films in similar reception situations, both in terms of space and time.

As this overview suggests, the postwar era marked another wave of cinema expansion—both in urban environments and in more remote areas. Efforts to bring cinema to the countryside, even by mobile means and thanks to small-gauge technology, were also accompanied by efforts to blend the experience of watching a film with the everyday routines of the day, to incorporate it more intensively into the everyday experience of the audience. To this end, “daytime” non-stop cinemas were created, showing films not only in the afternoon and not only in the evening, and not tied to institutions (for example, schools or churches), but rather to the civilian environment of the daily movement of the population—namely, transport infrastructure.

In addition to developing non-stop cinemas in city centers, other specialized non-stop cinemas were created specifically in Czechoslovakia at the airport of Ruzyně, and the introduction of Czech Railways screening-dining cars was also planned (Česálková 2011). This model of daytime cinemas projecting during the day and spatially tied most often to transport, to traffic or busy communication crossroads shared a specific type of practice of screening short films in repetitive loops, which allowed for both short-term and long-term visits not tied to a fixed start of the program. This space-time framework tilted cinema experience from a position bound by the traditional temporalities of institutions, be it cinema, culture, education, or industry, and blended it with the dynamic transport temporality of the city, in which repetitive routines intertwine with the unpredictability of human movement in urban environments where the planned trajectory may be skewed by random encounters, sensations of window displays, and the minutiae of busy traffic. While the cinema in the check-in hall at the airport or the dining car brought visual impulses into a certain in-between situation from which it is impossible to leave, the city’s non-stop cinemas allowed one to drop in to see the film even for a short while and to continue with other activities. In some aspects, however, these places shared the status of a transit space (Augé 1992; Savignac 2001), a place one does not visit, in the strict sense of the word, but passes through.

Short films thus reached viewers more often in transit situations related to the activities of their everyday life—this context also influenced the way they were consumed, the form of reception, as well as the cultural and social values attributed to these films. In view of the fact that in the case of short

films we usually have rather partial data on programming, attendance, or box office, it is necessary to combine this partial information with other sources, of which the audience surveys and memories of the eyewitnesses are the most telling of the audience practice at the time. Through them, we can better understand the habits of reception of short formats with pre-TV audiences.

### **Watching Non-fiction Film in the 1950s and the Prominence of the Non-stop Format**

The audience and its preferences for visiting the cinema should be seen in the wider context of urban behavior, the habits and movement of the individual in the city, in which the location of the cinema, the rules of its operation, and the functions connected to them also play an important role. A very good sense of the preferences and demands of the historical non-fiction film audience can be provided by contemporary audience research. Although these surveys were not created often and, if so, mostly focused on the mass audience of commercial cinemas, as their data could be related to data on attendance and box office, surveys of postwar viewers of non-fiction films can also be found in rare cases. In early postwar Germany, according to *Der Neue Film*, 97 percent of interviewees liked “*Kulturfilm*” in pre-programs and 93 percent liked matinees with “*Kulturfilm*.” At the same time, the same research showed that the audience understood “*Kulturfilm*” as a source of general education and that they did not reject short films from bombed-out German cities because they told people “about the cultural values that are still preserved” (“Was das Publikum sich wünscht” 1948). The high popularity figures for cultural films in Germany confirm that the informational and educational role of pre-programs and specialized screenings of short films in the early postwar period was generally welcome.

In Czechoslovakia, where cinema had been nationalized since 1945, similar research was carried out by the Czechoslovak Film Institute, which also established a specialized Film Audience Department in the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> In 1948, however, the Czechoslovak Film Institute was given the task of conducting a survey of the audience at two Prague Čas cinemas. These cinemas were opened a year earlier as non-stop cinemas of newsreel and

1 In the late 1940s, the Czechoslovak Film Institute prepared to carry out broader and more sophisticated audience research; in 1950, however, the audience research department was closed and only resumed its activities in the late 1950s (Szczepanik and Anděl 2008, 65–66).

short films, one at the largest and busiest space, Wenceslas Square,<sup>2</sup> and one on the side street adjacent to the two most important Prague railway stations, Hybernská (Havelka 1970, 225). According to this survey (Filmové noviny 1948), 59 percent of spectators regularly visited these cinemas once a week and preferred these cinemas to feature programs in standard cinemas. The most frequent visitors to these cinemas were men (69 percent), by profession mostly officials, workers, and students. The cinema on Hybernská Street found more loyal spectators, while the cinema at Wenceslas Square was visited often, but more occasionally, and its spectators also mentioned “free time and bad weather” as the reason for the visit. The female spectators were most often housewives who visited the cinema while shopping. This concerned both women from Prague and those who came to Prague from the countryside for work or shopping (mostly by trains). Both cinemas screened a program consisting of newsreels, other periodicals, and short films, which was repeated throughout the day in a loop, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. (the last loop on Hybernská Street started at 8 p.m., at Wenceslas Square it started at 9 p.m.). Among the topics of the newsreels, the most popular among viewers were sports and news from abroad, followed by politics, industry, fashion, and reports on cultural events. Viewers mentioned nature films, slapstick shorts, technology films, and travelogues as the most interesting of the short films.

A significant limit of this survey was that it did not focus on viewers of factual films in general, but viewers of specific cinemas that screened this content and were only one of the few of its kind in the then Czechoslovakia. The aim of the research was to examine the interest in this type of cinema, as state cinema was faced with the decision of whether to expand this exhibition format in other cities. In this respect, it was an important finding that Čas cinemas had their loyal audiences who were interested in sports and technological news, reports from nature, foreign countries, but also from culture. The audience therefore preferred the information function of the cinema, they did not comment on the artistic or social value of films or their political agenda.<sup>3</sup> Even more valuable were the findings about the regularity of the visit—a loyal majority of viewers of Čas cinemas went once

2 An interesting circumstance is that the former Koruna cinema, in whose building the Čas cinema opened in 1947, served as a so-called *Nachtkino* for Wehrmacht soldiers during the war. It was a night cinema, which screened the nonstop program for soldiers who were departing from Prague on night trains and needed to pass the time while waiting for their connection (Čvančara and Čvančara 2011, 51).

3 Assuming that similar comments were not published for ideological reasons, or that the audience intentionally avoided them—which cannot be ruled out.

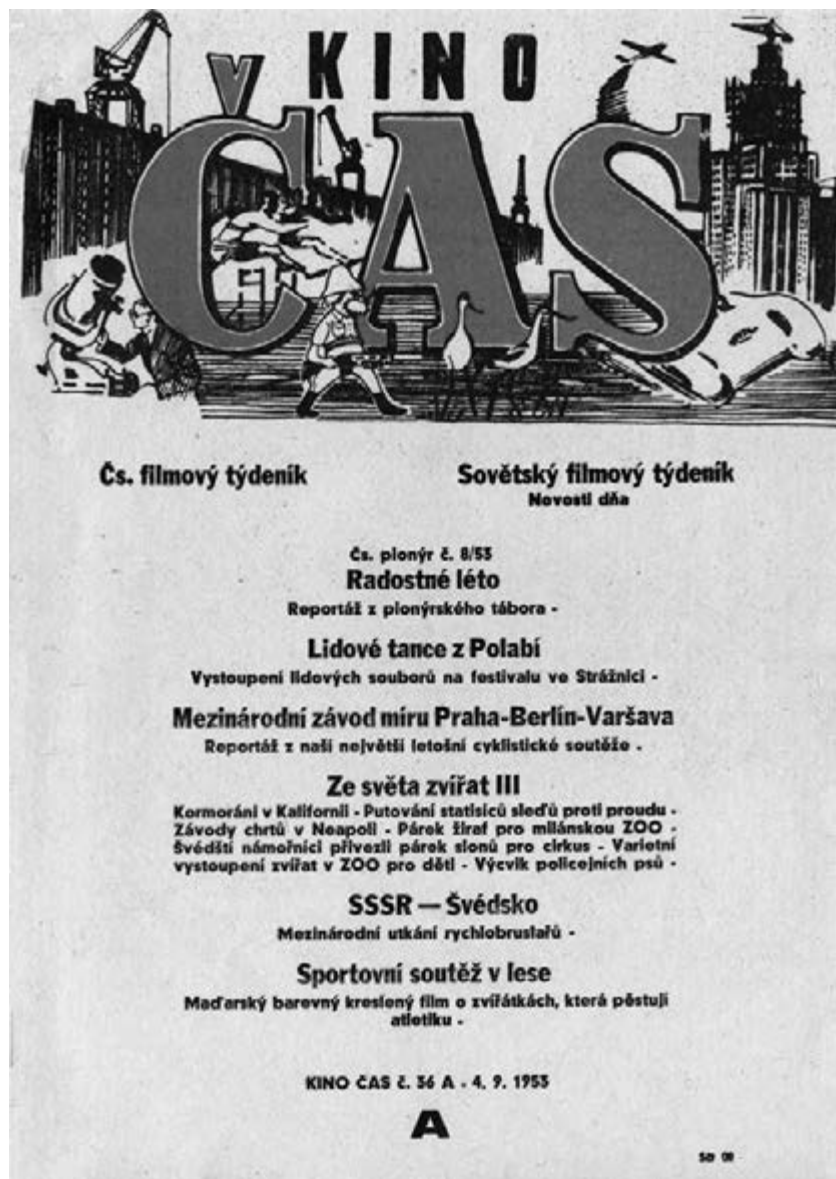


Figure 3.2. Cinema Time (Čas) program from 1956. Courtesy of Národní filmový archiv, Prague.

a week. The program also changed this often, so it was enough for a typical viewer to see it once and not repeat the visit in the same cycle. As part of this regularity, however, cinema visits used to be random—people made them when they had some extra time in the city. The loyalty of the audience thus did not lie in the systematic nature, the love for the film, or other

such factors, but rather in the interest in current events, which non-stop newsreel cinemas mediated very flexibly. In a sociocultural sense, attending non-stop cinemas was closer to the habits of reading newspapers, which could be intermittent, fragmentary, in a cafe, on a park bench, in a tram, and yet integrally inscribed into the routine of an individual's everyday life.

In addition to bigger research efforts on the level of state institutions, partial mentions in the audience's letters to various newspapers show that, at least in the early 1950s, viewers also appreciated the diversity of the program at Čas cinemas.

In the case of programming short films as pre-films as part of a feature-length program in mainstream cinemas, they criticized the contemporary tendency of thematic convergence, in which a sports-themed short film was added to a feature film from a sports environment, an industrial film was added to a feature film from an ironworks, and so on. "Why are we interested in the short cinema program [in Čas]? Because one film is from the Altai Mountains, the other from the laboratory and the third from the kolkhoz!" wrote the viewer (Kernerová 1950). The change of topics in the programs of Čas cinemas seemed to them to be a better format, offering information in a suitable diversity.

This line of argument corresponded to later findings from surveys of newsreel and short film audiences, which were conducted in late 1950s and published in 1961. In these surveys, the glut of work representation in non-fiction film emerged as the main criticism. Farmers complained that they did not want to see films about agriculture, while workers did not want films about industry ([Morava] 1961). After the era of heavy reconstruction, strongly focused on the development of industry, construction, and the collectivization of agriculture, and thus on work discipline, viewers explicitly deepened their lack of interest in work issues in non-fiction films and instead sought interesting news from abroad, science, and technology. Similarly, nature and sports remained popular throughout the decade, while the audience turned its attention to fashion and showed more interest in traffic discipline films. During the twelve years between these two surveys, of course, a number of political and social changes took place, and after the era of harsh Stalinism in the early 1950s Czechoslovakia became more open to consumer culture and the Western world.

This research from 1960 was one of the first manifestations of renewed interest in empiric-oriented sociological research in culture and followed up on contemporary works dealing with the transformation of the structure of leisure time and the role of culture in the ways it was spent. Karel Morava was one of the pioneers of Czechoslovak film audience research and the

author of key empirical studies from the 1960s: *Film Audience* (1961), *Film Audience Today and Tomorrow* (1966), and, together with Ivo Pondělíček, *Transformation of the Film Auditorium* (1966). Morava's late 1950s surveys of viewers of film newsreels and short films revealed basic quantitative data on viewers of factual forms and qualitative data on their popularity as well as reservations about them among various social groups of viewers, but also essential information about the relationship between viewers of the new news format, television news, to film newsreels.

The moment of media change was probably the key motivation of the sponsor of both surveys—Czechoslovak Film as a key cinema institution ([Morava] 1961). For Czechoslovak Film, the end of the 1950s was the period of the first negotiations with Czechoslovak Television regarding various types of cooperation and at the same time the period when protracted debates about the most suitable ways of distributing short film intensified. Television appeared to be a new distribution window for short films, while its new and essentially more up-to-date daily television news format represented competition to existing newsreels.

On the one hand, Morava's results from 1960 confirmed some of the earlier findings; on the other hand, from a long-term perspective, they seem to be more positive than the situation actually was. Morava perceived viewers of non-fiction films as committed and faithful, as evidenced by testing the audience of the newly opened short film cinema in Prague. According to him, the then Čas cinema in Prague was visited by 20,000 to 30,000 spectators a week, and some of the programs of the new short film cinema attracted over 5,000 spectators in three days (Morava 1963). This information is supported by various references in the press of the time, according to which people stood in front of the Čas cinemas to queue, they were regularly attended, and all cinemas of this type in total reached the average attendance of 100,000 spectators per week (Šolc 1957, 147). The most important of Morava's findings was that 83 percent of television news viewers still showed great interest in film newsreels, only 16 percent an average interest and 1 percent little or no interest.

Morava did not perceive the advent of television as a situation of crisis of factual formats in cinemas—according to him, on the contrary, it deepened interest in them: “The greater popularity of short films was undoubtedly helped by television, which makes extensive use of these films. Especially recently, we have a lot of evidence of how television viewers become devoted viewers of short films in cinemas” (Morava 1963). These opinions (at least on the basis of the answers of Morava's respondents) resulted from the impression of the initial qualitative lag of television news versus film newsreels.

Viewers reported that, based on their experience with television news, they became aware of certain qualities of newsreels, which in comparison they rated as better both visually and in terms of content. However, this increased interest proclaimed by Morava did not translate into a tendency to strengthen forms of film distribution and exhibition of newsreels and short films during the general crisis of attendance in the 1960s. During the 1960s (in line with the general trend) the Čas cinemas and the short film cinemas tended rather to disappear (Havelka 1976, 277–78).

Indeed, these trends in audience preferences were partly influenced by the advent of television, which began to play an increasingly important role in the daily lives of the population during the 1960s (Gauntlett and Hill 1999). Along with this, and with a partial decline in working hours, people reconsidered the importance of leisure time in their lives, they reinterpreted their own relationship to work and the role of media and culture for their personal fulfillment. Karel Morava argued that the end of the 1950s was a period of change in the habits of moviegoing—according to him, “the need to go to the cinema becomes a cultural need to see a particular film” (Morava 1963, 117). Morava describes this change with regard to the interest in thematic cycles programmed for short film cinemas. He claims that even in the case of non-fiction films, people were looking for a specific type of program. They were no longer just interested in visiting the cinema and experiencing a diversity of factual topics, as was the case before, but they were choosing with regard to their more differentiated interests. This is how Morava explains the good attendance of the thematic programs “A Little Travel, Courage, and Romance” (consisting of travelogues), “In Dance and Music” (consisting of documentary films about dance and music), and the like (Morava 1962). There was a similar reason for the success of the People’s Film University (Filmová lidová univerzita)—a late 1950s educational film institution that offered programs of several thematically related short films, most often of the popular science type, accompanied by a lecture (Česálková and Váradi 2015). Comprehensive specialized programs suited more selective audiences and were one of the efforts of the state film to save cinema attendance during the boom of television broadcasting.

The destiny of short non-fiction films was (and still is) the rather random attention of the audience. However, these films also had their regular supporters, who gave them an irregular length of time in “transit” non-stop cinemas, filling up various periods of time in their visits to the city. These viewers identified with the program and were aware of its unique informative and educational role, and welcomed the flexibility of its availability, breaking them out of the routine of their work. By the end of the 1950s,



based on audience research, attention began to shift more to cinemas of short films, which were more often focused on thematic programs, as opposed to pluralistically focused programs from the beginning of the decade.

### **Spectatorship as Filling the Time, Spectatorship as Citizenship**

Karel Morava's thesis, that at the end of the 1950s the audience no longer "goes to the cinema," but chooses a specific program, is also partially supported by the memories of historical spectators. During the 1950s, fans of cultural and documentary films also began to specialize as distinct groups of audiences. Their choices may have been, on the one hand, linked to the routines of movement in the developing postwar urban space, and, on the other hand, based on the value frameworks of culturally and politically engaged social groups and helping to shape their identities.

As pointed out by research into the new history of cinema, the notion of audience experience should not be limited to reception, but needs to be captured within the circumstances that govern the experience of moviegoing, that is, the social and cultural background, ways of film circulation, the architecture and equipment of the cinema, and its location, but above all perceives the consumption of culture and media in the continuity of life in the family, in the workplace, in the neighborhood, and in the community (Van de Vijver and Biltereyst 2013, 563). In accordance with these approaches, Annette Kuhn takes into account the different levels of influence when analyzing the ways people remember the cinema experience. According to her research, we can distinguish three types of cinema memory: first, memories of specific film scenes, usually associated with strong emotional experiences; second, situated memories of films; and, third, memories of moviegoing. It is the third, most represented category of memories on moviegoing that most closely links the cinema experience with everyday social life and leisure activities, while also emphasizing the location of the cinema in the urban space (Kuhn 2011).

To date, very little research has been carried out on the documentary audience. In addition, within the project from which my findings originate, "ViCTOR-E: Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration and Reconstruction in Post-WWII Europe," the experience with non-fiction films was only one of a number of goals of oral-historical research. The people we spoke to in our research were not selected based on their identification with the film. The forty-two interviews, conducted in France, Italy, Germany, and the Czech

Republic, focused on the interviewees' everyday lives in the postwar period in general, so that their relationship to film, film culture, and in particular non-fiction film would stand out against this broader background of the individual story at a particular historical period.

The common denominator of our interviewees' memories of non-fiction films is therefore their ephemerality. These memories are mostly fragments that do not necessarily result in more extensive narration. Nevertheless, the memories of a non-fiction film that we gathered can be divided into four basic categories. First of all, these are memories of specific types of screenings (for example, screenings of newsreels and short films before the main program, but also non-stop cinemas, educational screenings, etc.) and related practices (interview, Vlastimil Bichler). In this case, viewers remember, as general audience research shows, the situation of the visit, they mention popular types of programs, and they recall the ordinary regularity of their visits to this "popular type of entertainment" (Kokešová 2015, 294). The second, less common type are memories of the strong emotional effect of political news, which may be further linked to a certain otherwise vital topic—for example, the relationship to another culture and its language. This was the case with a Frenchwoman, for example, who associated the need to learn German in high school with an unpleasant memory of viewing German newsreels (interview, Gisèle Moreau). The third type of memory places the non-fiction film in the position of a formative experience that has influenced the viewer in their political commitment and interest in public affairs. This mode can be called "spectatorship as citizenship" and can be illustrated by the example of one Frenchman who related the process of postwar renewal in his city with the reconstruction of the local cinema and the opportunity to watch various informational films from home and around the world (interview, Jean Fé dini). These screenings further shaped his interest in politics, which later grew into a political candidacy and resulted in him becoming the local mayor. In his personal memories, researcher Michel Cieutat describes his postwar cinema experience as a "rite" and recalls watching short documentaries "because most of them taught us something, or even inspired us to take up a vocation." This memory is quite concrete and proves that short films could have a formative function in viewers' lives:

After watching a film about the life and work of miners in the north of France with great intensity, I was overcome with the desire to enter this profession, despite the sequence about firedamp. The little lamp above the helmet and the soot-blackened faces of the workers, signs of deep

virility, justified in themselves the interest I had in this profession whose harshness and danger totally escaped me. (Cieutat 2005)

The fourth type of memory is memories of active participation in the formation of various formal or semi-formal local film clubs or communities associated with the screening of non-fiction films, often amateur ones, or at schools or other institutions (interviews with Ernst Hirsch, Gisèle Moreau, and Ettore Pirazzoli). This type of “spectatorship as a community-building” is more closely linked to associated organizational and other activities, emphasizes the role of the individual in the broader community and/or interest group that situates him or her in a network of relationships and values (Rose 1999), and may or may not have a political background.

It is significant that we mostly do not find the second two types of memories among the interviewees from Czechoslovakia—they limit themselves to the first type and mention the information role that newsreels and short films played for them. It is this aspect that allows us to take into account that despite the sometimes ephemeral availability of short films and sometimes short-term nature of club activities, non-fiction films have been able to shape political engagement and civic bias, support the creation of active communities, and contribute to the development of postwar public sphere and civil society—especially in the West. As Jana Kokešová’s research on audiences of Brno’s Čas cinema shows, Czechoslovak audiences preferred the informational and recreational role of watching newsreels and short films and did not deny that the motivation of visiting a non-stop cinema could also be to fill the time they would otherwise have to spend waiting for further activity in the city or for transport connections (Kokešová 2015). The Čas cinema offered them an open space of time that could be spent watching information media. Czechoslovak audiences of the 1950s could not form a similarly strong community or politically engaged attachment to the institution of cinema under Stalinism as audiences in Western European countries. Nevertheless, despite the frequent propagandistic use of non-fictional forms at the time, they retained an interest in the informational value of short films, which was why they frequented the Čas cinemas.

### **Programming Flow before TV Flow**

The first postwar decade in Europe is unique in that it is the last decade of film’s sovereign position as the only medium of audiovisual information and instruction. Television has been gradually gaining ground in

individual countries since the 1950s, and it has also changed viewing habits in relation to factual content. The 1950s was a period of dramatic changes, especially in terms of population movement, not only with regard to early postwar migration but also changes in urban–rural relations. Film mediatization of the countryside was to be achieved at the beginning of the decade with a massive emphasis on traveling cinemas and at the end of the effort to equip as many cultural halls in the villages as possible with 16 mm technology. In the early 1960s in Europe, however, traveling cinemas were almost nonexistent. Their extended role as mediators between the centers and the periphery was taken over by the networks of 16 mm nontheatrical venues and television sets, which allowed the simultaneity of the audiovisual experience in the city and the countryside (Česálková 2018).

In the late 1940s and during the 1950s, short non-fiction formats did not just expand through their mobility into space, but also expanded over time, through various specialized modes of exhibition outside the evening time. Specific types of popular factual programs gradually became crystallized, typical primarily for the first two postwar decades. An event that focused on non-fiction and short formats, rather than combining them with entertainment, proved to be a success. Such events create environments that concentrate faithful viewers around them, also due to the fact that the consumption of short films has a different temporality than the consumption of feature films. Short films are much more a part of everyday life (people drop in to see them in non-stop cinemas) and their spectators can be defined as casual viewers, but they still perceive the role of this type of experience in their lives as essential.

A very significant dimension of these cinemas was also their low threshold and openness. Both Morava's research from Czechoslovakia and the memories of eyewitnesses confirm that the audience groups of non-stop cinemas were not defined by class or generation—these cinemas attracted a diverse audience. The price of a ticket at these cinemas was two to three times cheaper than at a regular cinema and the ticket, due to the constant circulation of the guests, was not for a specific place—the audience sat wherever there was a free seat. Non-stop cinemas offered a unique opportunity for audience members not to be tied to the beginning of the performance, but to go whenever they had the time, or the appetite, or were forced to do so by circumstances (for example, bad weather, missed train, etc.). It was no coincidence that these cinemas in Czechoslovakia were called “Time”—they offered a specific temporality of the cinema experience. These cinemas did not have much advertising and often did not even promote specific films.

They were random and yet regular; as spectators describe it, a visit to this cinema was regularly connected with all their visits to the city.

Historically, it is clear that short films from the 1910s onwards were always looking for the right place and the right time for their exhibition. The disputes with commercial cinemas, which did not want to screen them, the pressure from producers and, most often, educational institutions, which supported their production and release, led states to introduce various forms of legislation promoting their use in mainstream cinema programs—either in the form of taxes or the obligation to screen them as pre-programs. In the last decade of a predominantly pre-television audience, in the 1950s, the newsreel and documentary format had its own place both in cinemas and nontheatrical venues. In venues specialized in short film programming, however, these films were able to achieve higher attendance and, we can also argue, higher popularity.

This was helped by a new stratification of urban every day, coupled with small duties, work, family tasks, and entertainment—new rhythms of free time within which one could find a brief period in which to watch a short film. Non-stop cinemas were located in city centers, at busy communication junctions, and typically at or near railway stations to attract their audiences at the places of their daily transport. The key was their easy accessibility in the city at any time of the day, which made them specific urban transit points. Viewers in these cinemas, for these reasons, too, preferred lighter factual genres—not political and social films, but rather sports, nature, travel, popular science, films about new technological developments, and also about culture. They drew lessons and information from the films, broadened their horizons, and in the West, they perceived their civic and community dimension. Despite the relatively positive results of the first surveys of cinema attendance of short films in specialized cinemas, it is clear that this form of programming and exhibition did not survive the 1960s, during which television became increasingly dominant as a major distribution window for short films.

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## 4. Coproducing Postwar Socialist (Re)construction

Transnational Documentaries in Eastern Europe

*Marsha Siefert*

### Abstract

The emergence of the Eastern Bloc significantly affected how postwar reconstruction was conceived and portrayed in the early Cold War years. The East European film industries became a new battleground, with postwar reconstruction requiring political assessment of personnel and film themes. This chapter discusses Soviet films coproduced between 1948 and 1950 with Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany and awarded Stalin Prizes, along with the first of many collective Eastern European films by Joris Ivens. This chapter has two aims: first, to explore how Soviet and socialist-linked filmmakers formed arrangements to visualize postwar reconstruction as socialist construction in Eastern Europe and second, to articulate how Soviet film partnerships were used to enlist sympathetic film personnel in the transformation of domestic film industries.

**Keywords:** coproduction, documentary film, Joris Ivens, Soviet Union, Eastern Europe

Reconstruction after the Second World War was a formidable task for the victors and losers alike. Although on the winning side, the USSR had to cope with tremendous loss of life—estimated at close to twenty million civilian deaths and almost eight million military casualties (Rieber 2022, 218–20)—as well as with the physical devastation in the battleground regions of the Eastern Front. Reconstruction efforts were hampered by depletion of resources, food shortages, and a lack of skilled labor, as all had been conscripted for wartime fighting and survival (Zubkova 2004). The fraying

Allied alliance added to these challenges; newsreels of the victors at Yalta and Potsdam visually projected a connection that by 1946 was curtained off from the rebuilding West. Between 1946 and 1949 the USSR, with the support of local cadres, carried out Sovietization in the nations that would become known in Cold War terminology as “Eastern Europe.”

Cinematically, the frontline Soviet film groups responsible for wartime newsreels and documentary films had been encouraged to film the partisans and soldiers involved in liberating occupied Europe, as well as wartime atrocities, in anticipation of reusing this footage in postwar documentary film (Raiklin 2019, 161). These film groups continued working together after the war, adapting their subject matter to themes appropriate to the reconstruction of the USSR. In contrast, the film industries of many East European countries had either been occupied and/or made films on behalf of the now defeated powers. These East European film industries became a new battleground, with postwar reconstruction requiring political assessment of personnel as well as of film themes, increasingly complicated by the domestic politics of Sovietization. By the late 1940s, offers from the USSR to “coproduce” a documentary would not be easy to refuse. This chapter addresses the themes and relations in non-fiction filmmaking sponsored by or involving the USSR and Eastern Europe in transnational coalitions in the early postwar period.

The approach was inspired by the discovery of an official Soviet catalog of films made between 1946 and 1954 (Taylor 2016), compiled on behalf of the Soviet film school VGIK (1955). An appendix to this catalog listed twenty-four films that the Soviet authorities considered “coproductions.” Of these films, twenty-one were documentaries, and a majority were coproductions with East European filmmakers. Here I will discuss three coproduced films made between 1948 and 1950—with Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany—that were awarded Stalin Prizes. The period also overlaps with the participation of the Dutch documentary filmmaker Joris Ivens in collective Eastern European projects. His first film, *Pierwsze lata/Prvá léta* (The first years, 1949), attempted to do something similar to the Soviet project for early socialist achievements in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Poland. Through these films this chapter explores how Soviet and socialist-linked filmmakers formed cooperative arrangements to cinematically visualize postwar reconstruction as socialist construction in Eastern Europe. In addition, the chapter will articulate how film partnerships were used in the postwar process of Sovietization to identify and enlist sympathetic local film personnel in the socialist transformation of the domestic film industries and the films they were to produce.

## Postwar Reconstruction as Socialist Construction in Soviet Documentary Cinema

Soviet preparation for postwar cinema production—especially newsreels and compilation documentaries—was already anticipated by the definitive wartime reorganization of the newsreel studio in 1944. Renamed the Tsentral'naia studiia dokumental'nykh fil'mov (TsSDF, Central Documentary Film Studio), the studio was responsible for documenting the meetings of the victors at Yalta and Potsdam. The new postwar environment required a rapid reformulation of Soviet propaganda messages, however. As Vladimir Pechatnov suggests, by 1946 the victorious Red Army had become a liability in the “liberated” European territories, ideological competition had already begun with the former allies, and any favorable conditions to pursue Soviet foreign policy were rapidly disappearing (Pechatnov 2001, 1–4). The Soviet discussion of workable propaganda themes—whether for press pronouncements or feature films—continued in the face of the apparent success of American and British efforts at rebuilding Europe, with the Marshall Plan as a particular target.

In the immediate flush of victory, the theme of “liberation” had been elaborated by Soviet filmmakers through the documentary films *Osvobozhdenaia Sovetskoi Belorussii* (The liberation of Soviet Belorussia, dir. Vladimir Korsch-Sablin and Mikola Sadkovich, 1944) and *Osvobozhdenaia Chekhoslovakiia* (Liberated Czechoslovakia, dir. Ilia Kopalin, 1945).<sup>1</sup> Liberation remained a theme in Soviet postwar documentary, handled differently depending upon whether the land being liberated was occupied, as Czechoslovakia, or an enemy, as with the Axis powers of Nazi Germany and Hungary. But additional cinematic themes were required to visualize the peace.

Building upon historian Mark Edele's description of the postwar Soviet “culture of victory” (2019, 781), I would characterize the postwar Soviet documentary as celebrating the “victory of the Soviet system.” Thus, the views of ruins, trauma, and obliteration that characterized “rubble films,” neorealism, and other postwar cinematic trends were not the norm in postwar Soviet documentaries. Rather, these films emphasized the success of the Soviet system in transforming the countryside and highlighted visual evidence of industrialization and modernization in everyday life. Even when a postwar documentary did portray an area like Belorussia (today's Belarus)

<sup>1</sup> Both films were re-issued in 1975 for the thirtieth anniversary of the war victory. The liberation theme was actively revived in the early 1970s as the title of a five-part coproduced film series on the war (*Osvobozhdenie* [Liberation], dir. Iuri Ozerov, 1971–72).

that was devastated by wartime fighting, the emphasis was on the population's recovery from the war, especially the material and social benefits of the Soviet system, as explained by Raisa Sidenova (2021, 84). These themes carried over into the Soviet film coproductions with "brotherly countries."

Eastern Europe also faced postwar devastation, from barren battlegrounds to a reduced and impoverished population. For those who lost the war, questions about the Holocaust were also beginning to surface. Even in those countries where wartime destruction was not as great, reconstruction rhetoric had to incorporate the new politics on the ground as well as to respond to war trauma among the population. As Holly Case (2011, 83–92) argues, reconstruction after earlier wars in the region was seen as part of nation-building. The population redistributions and territorial remapping after World War II were also interpreted within that nationalist rhetoric. Each country in Eastern Europe came into the Soviet orbit in circumstances particular to its history and wartime alliance. These political transformations were individuated and contested.<sup>2</sup> However, for the most part, local East European politicians were able to draw upon national precedents of economic revival to make the case for their own programs of land reform and industrialization, while supporting the central planning that arrived with Sovietization. Thus, with national variants, local politicians could claim socialist reforms as "indigenous and popular, rather than imposed from the outside" (Case 2011, 86). The fruits of these reforms could also be conveyed visually. Film footage showing improved agricultural production, new industrial plants, and rebuilt city infrastructures, populated with "ordinary" peasants and workers, could help persuade local populations that reconstruction—and rebuilding the nation—were indeed progressive and progressing.

These images were foundational to portraying the larger and lasting "victory of the socialist system." During the late 1940s Soviet documentary film directors were assigned to create non-fiction film portraits of each of the countries of Eastern Europe, in effect aiming to visually integrate the Eastern Bloc. Ideally, the films were to be made as collaborative projects with local filmmakers to demonstrate their increasing solidarity and commonality of purpose. Soviet filmmakers had already completed documentaries on the various Soviet republics, working with republic studios to identify regional features through images and music (Sidenova 2021). This well-honed Soviet production system, building on the wartime working relationships of directors, writers, and cameramen, was then extended to the proposed Soviet coproductions with the countries of Eastern Europe.

2 Naimark and Gibianskii (1997) offer a classic account.

What constituted a coproduction was interpreted broadly during these postwar years (Siefert 2012), judging by the Soviet list.<sup>3</sup> The Soviet press described them as “made with the film workers of ....” Local film personnel were recognized in the credits as cinematographers, script writers, or members of the crew. They might participate in preparing the film for screening in their own country, acting as translator, adding a voice-over soundtrack, or arranging a film screening. While only one of the late 1940s coproduced documentaries had a codirector listed from the partner country, almost all used a local scriptwriter, preferably a party member, and a national composer, often employed in local media. The inclusion of film professionals and the designation of the film as a coproduction served the Soviet propaganda intent to embody “friendship and cooperation” through industrial re-organization of the cinema industry as well as through the films themselves.

The number and type of film personnel available for a Soviet coproduction differed by country. Coproductions with Bulgaria or Albania, where film production before the war had been minimal, were not only documenting reconstruction but also building a cinema infrastructure. Films made in cooperation with well-developed and intact film studios, as in what became the GDR, in Hungary, and in Czechoslovakia, were subject to the complexity of postwar politics. Film industries had to be “denazified,” “nationalized,” and “Sovietized,”; filmmakers’ careers were precarious and daily lives uncertain. This process was also influenced by repatriated communist creative personnel—writers, musicians, filmmakers often returned from Moscow—who enabled the political transformation of the domestic film industries. Since many of the Eastern Bloc countries had either been occupied by or served with the fascist enemy, the cinematic representation of their wartime participation and activities required careful framing, verbally and visually. By 1950, filmmakers from all of the Eastern European countries had participated in a coproduced Soviet documentary film.<sup>4</sup>

3 During the late 1940s, there was also an attempt in Western Europe to make a five-country coproduced film, *A Tale of Five Cities*. Each country—West Germany, the UK, France, Italy, and Austria (originally Hungary)—produced its own episode with a frame story of an amnesiac US soldier searching for his European wife. Its original aim was to “further European reconstruction.” The film was finally produced and premiered in 1951, with little impact. Paul Rotha, at the time active in the World Union of Film Documentary, said coproductions had the potential to “break down national barriers and bring about a wider European understanding for peaceful ends” (Dämon 2021, 213–14).

4 The USSR had coproduced a war film with Yugoslavia in 1946; this cooperation ended with the 1948 Stalin–Tito split.

Sergei Drobashenko, a contemporaneous Soviet historian of film documentary, described these coproduced documentary films as a collective:

[They] were characterized by a sharp ideological vector, by detailed stories of social and economic life of the nations that had stepped on the road of socialist development, by a broad range of representations of social and cultural achievements in the countries that had made up a world socialist system. (1961, 541)

He credited the collaboration of Soviet filmmakers with journalists, directors, and cameramen from the “foreign democratic countries” as contributing to the “development of cultural relations and the strengthening of friendship between socialist nations” (1961, 542). In essence, he reiterated the language of the treaties of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance between the USSR and the Eastern Bloc countries signed during the late 1940s. His descriptive phrase—“the filmed diaries of cameramen”—linked the war to the postwar cinematic techniques as well as to the documentary directors who practiced them.

Filmmakers valued these assignments; to be asked to direct a film about countries abroad was an honor that came with travel to the subject country. The staff list of coproduced films with the “brotherly countries”<sup>5</sup> reads like a who’s who of the top Soviet documentary directors: Roman Katsman (Grigoriev) and Marianna Fideleva (*Bolgariia* [Bulgaria], 1946), Vasilii Nikolaevich Beliaev (*Rumyniia* [Romania], 1947), Leonid Varlamov (*Pol’sha* [Poland], 1948), and Ilia Kopalín (*Novaia Albaniia* [New Albania], 1948). Many of the coproduction directors were chosen after having made a successful documentary on a Soviet republic, thereby demonstrating their ability to work with regional specificities. They had all also proved their patriotism in making documentaries during the war, many winning Stalin Prizes.

The uniformity shown by these coproduced documentaries may at first render them uninteresting. As one assistant on these films recalled of the Soviet model, all fit one stereotype. “If they forged steel in ‘Kirghizia’ and did not forge it in ‘Turkmenistan,’ the picture was returned for remakes” (Katanián 1997). According to a more recent account, the films were shot “according to a certain once-and-for-all approved scheme, with clearly defined heroes and obligatory episodes.” The films were “baked like cakes.”

5 My discussion is limited to European locations, so I do not include the several “coproduced” films on Mongolia or China, e.g., *Osvobozhdennyi Kitai* (Liberated China, dir. Sergei Gerasimov, 1950).

In fact, a feast was indispensable to show how well one lived in the Soviet system, the “gastronomic dreams of a Soviet man in a hungry postwar era” (Andrikanis 2016).

Yet I argue that these films can also be considered as a genre—postwar “reconstruction as socialist construction”—that builds upon the interwar “socialism-in-construction” documentary genre described by Rossen Djagalov (2020, 180). The postwar documentaries added something new: the confidence of wartime victory and an expectation of a broader—and emerging socialist—audience. The reasons for their persistence as a genre are similar to how Maria Belodubrovskaya characterizes the longevity of the Stalinist biopic: an attempt by filmmakers, under extreme political pressure and in highly uncertain conditions, to “minimize the risk” that too much experimentation might entail as well as to capitalize on a model that had proved successful (2011, 48).

And risk there was. The postwar havoc wreaked upon the arts during the Zhdanovschina, or anti-cosmopolitan campaign, had begun to affect feature films in the waning days of the war (see, e.g., Davies 2004) and continued in the fields of literature (from 1946) and music (from 1948). The tried-and-true documentary film formula must have seemed like a safe choice. Yet in March 1949, at a meeting with almost 200 of his colleagues, the documentary filmmaker Dziga Vertov (e.g., *Tri pesni o Lenine* [Three songs about Lenin, 1934])—was publicly accused of formalism and his cinematic techniques were critiqued for undermining the socialist realist aesthetic (Roshal 1997). The documentary filmmakers who attended this meeting—Roman Karmen, Esfir Shub, Ilia Kopalín, Leonid Varlamov, Roman Katsman, Mikola Sadkovich, and Lidiia Stepanova among them—included many if not most of the directors who were selected for these coproduced documentaries with the brotherly nations. This event could not but have had an impact on those documentary directors with films that were completed or in production. Thus, these coproduced Soviet documentaries with/on countries in the Eastern Bloc must be viewed in light of how their content was shaped in ways that would not displease the film-viewer-in-chief, who paid close attention to finished films up until his death.

The formulaic nature of these films, as well as the chilling effect that the March 1949 meeting would have had on the attending filmmakers, would seem to minimize their value for documenting postwar reconstruction. However, this chapter argues that the films individually and as a group have something to offer by calling attention to the socialist framing itself, as well as recognizing their projected role in what Rachel Applebaum has called the Soviet “friendship project” (2019, 8). Filmmakers working together to



coproduce the documentaries aimed to strengthen transnational socialist ties, both institutionally and personally. Numerous film weeks, book weeks, translations, and art exhibitions arranged by friendship societies in the coproducing countries multiplied the expectations for these coproduced films beyond their exchange value. Taken together, these films reinforced mutual explanations of the new postwar reality in state-socialist Europe.

These films also embody the propaganda messages and images that the USSR was developing to counter the postwar narrative from the “West.” For example, they provide visual documentation of the Soviet peace movement, formally initiated in late 1948 (Roberts 2014), and portray its anti-war, anti-fascist themes as contributing concretely to a more “optimistic” and “utopian” postwar reconstruction. The incorporation of “history” in the films offers documentary evidence—even as that evidence is edited into a predictable story—of new national narratives that use reconstruction as a reason for historical reinterpretation as well as identifying nascent socialist roots.

Socialist realism as a film aesthetic also was up for reinterpretation, especially in working with film personnel from equally impressive cinematic traditions, as in East-Central Europe. Now that peace was declared, wartime directors had to reckon with the ambiguities of socialist realism in practice. Postwar documentary often required that reality be “varnished” in order to represent everyday life in the best possible light (Sidenova 2021, 86), but using “authentic” footage was still expected. Historical re-enactments—that is, staged representations of the past—were contested practices. Filmmakers had to find ways to bring a proto-socialist past to life, projecting backward to portray the “indigenous” roots of the socialist system while presenting the contemporary “visual truth” as interpreted within the aesthetics of socialist realism.

Youth had always figured heavily in Soviet film. For the postwar documentaries, young people became the heroes, showing not only their active role in socialist (re)construction, but also symbolizing the regeneration of the nation. As the biennial youth festivals in the Eastern Bloc (Prague in 1947, Budapest in 1949, Berlin in 1951) assumed a larger role in the propagandization of a socialist international space (see, e.g., Koivunen 2022), the filmed reports on youth festivals evolved from the subject of short film newsreels into documentaries of their own by the early 1950s. Of all the Soviet postwar campaigns, the state’s positive emphasis on friendship and peace among young people was judged to be the most successful (Fürst 2010, 86) and could be amplified visually and musically through documentary footage. To anticipate, one Soviet review proclaimed: “[T]he future belongs to the young, and it has to be beautiful and peaceful” (Pogozheva 1951, 6).

Soviet coproduced documentaries also recalled the *kulturfilmy* of the interwar period, with images of traditional costumes and pastimes. Some of the directors of the postwar Soviet coproductions had been active in that genre and their cameramen had developed many new film techniques for enlivening documentary footage (Sarkisova 2017, 120, 209). With the coming of sound, the interwar socialism-in-construction films elaborated the message with voice-over narrative and included a range of musical scores, both local and composed, to evoke the setting (Djagalov 2020, 185). What the postwar documentaries added to this practice, I suggest, is the interweaving of filmed music festivals to provide diegetic accompaniment and the use of cinematic tropes from film musicals, especially in the presentation of rural scenes, drawing upon a socialist realist genre valued by the Soviet leadership. Adding locally composed music to the voice-over narrative also offered an opportunity to involve the professional musicians of the country being visualized, nationalizing a propagandistic text through the soundtrack. Given the success of Stalinist musical films in optimizing utopian portrayals of a joyous socialist future (Anderson 1995; Taylor 1999) as well as their extensive distribution in the Eastern Bloc, it is not surprising that these documentaries included real-life footage of singing and dancing, incorporated into a country portrait of socialist reconstruction.

None of the films discussed here were available for viewing, so I use published reviews, archival material, photographic stills, posters, and in one case online footage as trace evidence of the visual.<sup>6</sup> With these caveats, this chapter looks at the three coproduced Soviet films and one DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) collaborative documentary from the late 1940s in order to explore how coproductions and the transnational relations they required aided the construction of a postwar socialist cine-sphere through documentary film.

## Democratic Hungary

Until 1948, Hungary operated in a pluralist political environment. Occupied by the Red Army in 1945 following its defeat by the Allies, Hungary had a governing coalition consisting of four major parties, one of which was the Communist Party. Unusually, this governing coalition was reflected in the

6 Especially valuable is an online database compiled by Russian film historian Valerii I. Fomin, documenting the wartime filmmakers at the Central Documentary Film Studio, their follow-up career, and related reminiscences (<https://csdfmuseum.ru/>).

organization of cinema, with each party distributing among themselves a majority of the surviving movie theaters, hence selecting and sometimes producing the screen fare (Kenez 2006, 242). Of the few films made in Hungary between 1945 and 1948, it is noteworthy that *Valahol Európában* (Somewhere in Europe, dir. Géza Radványi, HU, 1948) was produced by Mafirt, the communist film organization, and achieved a European standing for its vision of a socialist postwar Europe. The screenplay was written by communist film theorist Béla Balázs, recently returned from Moscow where he had been living since 1933. Constantin Parvulescu (2015, 20) suggests that *Somewhere in Europe* fulfilled the “social functions” of a “reconstruction film.” These functions were “to provide an interpretation of the war, to establish reliable criteria defining guilt (antifascism), to depict the tough reality of the postwar situation, and to articulate a narrative of return to political life.” Yet *Somewhere in Europe* did not serve the stated purposes of the coproduced Soviet documentaries. The Hungarian Communist Party criticized the film for lacking references to the “liberating” Red Army and to Stalin and for its depiction of the “tough reality of the postwar situation,” rather than a “victory of the socialist system” (ibid., 31). Three months after the film’s premiere in January 1948, the Hungarian film industry was nationalized, and the film’s progenitor passed away.

Into this Hungarian environment came Lidiia Stepanova, a well-known Soviet documentary filmmaker since the 1930s. After the war she made two documentaries—*Sovetskaia Estoniia* (Soviet Estonia, USSR, 1946) and *Moskva: stolitsa SSSR* (Moscow, capital of the USSR, USSR, 1948)—before being assigned *Demokratische Hungary* (Democratic Hungary, USSR-HU, 1949), which premiered in Moscow in January 1949. The film was cowritten by Iván Boldizsár, a journalist who had deserted from the Hungarian Army at the Don and awaited the arrival of the Red Army in Budapest. After the war he made his way into the pro-Soviet elite as a newspaper editor, an ideal writer to develop an appropriate narrative for *Democratic Hungary*.

In a lengthy review of the film from *Iskusstvo Kino*, the Soviet writer Vladlen Kagarlitskii claimed that the filmmaker should choose only “truthful and persuasive facts,” not just the “most colorful and typical characteristics of a country.” Those facts should be organized so that “an organic transition from one episode to another would lead the viewer to a particular conclusion” (1949, 28). The particular conclusion is left in no doubt: a gallery of Budapest monuments visually documents “the centuries-long struggle [of Hungarians] for liberation” and glosses over the fact that the Red Army was not welcomed by most Hungarians in 1945. The film also dramatizes Hungarian workers “building a state for [them]selves,” a popular Hungarian slogan. “The film

camera captures truthful and precise details: the united congress of the Communist and Social-Democratic Parties; [...] public schools no longer threatened by clerical oppression; Hungary's free art" (ibid., 28).

Thus, while these images are unsurprising, the historical footage of the "Hungarian struggle for liberation" was artfully inserted. For example, in reel three (Footage Farm n.d.), documentary footage of the crowds gathered around Béla Kun during the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 was spliced into the story of a prize-winning worker at a ship-building plant. Also mentioned by the reviewer is "the great passion" with which the filmmakers document the hundredth anniversary celebration of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. Not mentioned is the fact that it was the Russian Army that quelled that uprising. Instead, the reviewer comments on the "torch march of the young people of Budapest, their oath at the Petöfi statue," which appears staged for the camera.<sup>7</sup> That might indeed have been an intentional "creation of fact," given that the Communist Party of Hungary orchestrated the celebrations that the Soviets filmed. As Péter Apor explained, the celebrations aimed "to establish the Communist party as the heir of the national liberation and democratic movement, thus turning the tiny elite of leftist radicals into the true vanguard of national spirit" (2014, 13). While this effort ultimately failed, the Soviet incorporation of the celebrations into the documentary represented a highpoint of this campaign. These sequences also demonstrated a Soviet documentary technique for incorporating history into the narrative: "The mode of looking for analogies in the past, rather than for temporal sequences was typical of Stalinist historical representations" (ibid., 14). Thus, juxtaposing historical film footage with contemporary shots rather than portraying chronologically based arguments would, as the Soviet reviewer commented, "lead the viewer to a particular conclusion."

The last portion of *Democratic Hungary* included the now familiar scenes of celebration in the countryside, winemaking, and folk-costumed youth. The "ethnic music," complimented by the Soviet reviewer, was arranged and supplemented by the young composer György Ránki, who had studied folk music and ethnomusicology with Kodaly among others. At the time of the documentary filming, he was director of the music section of Hungarian Radio, thus likely willing to compose a film score. The musically accompanied, youthful winemaking was followed by footage of the Moscow

7 The scene was reminiscent of the partisan's oath in Frank Capra's wartime documentary *The Battle for Russia* (US, 1945), which Stepanova prepared for its Russian-language distribution (Siefert 2003).

signing of the February 18, 1948, Friendship Treaty between the USSR and the Hungarian Republic, which came into force two months later. The signing ceremony shows those present from both countries and is preceded by a brief live shot of Stalin. The film continues with parade footage but ends with shots of the sculpture of the Anonymous Poet and the Liberty Statue on Gellért Hill in Budapest.

The interspersing of the political references to communism with the cultural achievements of Hungary suggests that Stepanova aimed to add an aesthetic dimension to the finished product. “She surrounded herself with master artisans, skillfully guiding them, wringing seven sweats out of them. And all for the good of the cause” (Katanian 1997). According to her friend and colleague Irina Venzher (1963), Stepanova endlessly searched for the new, vivid impressions, aiming “to summarize everything seen and make it the property of millions of viewers.” Presumably, these achievements were to be visually noticeable in the finished film, which premiered in Hungary on January 16, 1949, as *Uj Magyarországól*; “Democratic” was replaced by “New” in the title and a Hungarian voice-over narrative was added. Attending the Budapest premiere, along with the Soviet ambassador and other Hungarian dignitaries, Stepanova expressed appreciation for her Hungarian colleagues working on the film and described the “joy and sincere enthusiasm” that she invested in its preparation (“Sztjepánova beszél az *Uj Magyarországól*” 1949).

Nonetheless, her cinematic standards and her five Stalin Prizes did not protect her. In 1952 Stepanova filmed a documentary, *Po Krasnodarskomu raiu* (Around the Krasnodar territory, USSR, 1952), about the historical region of the Kuban in southern Russia. The film did not please Stalin. “You showed people poorly, our people do not live like that,” he said, according to her grandson (Ratsimor 2014). A fellow filmmaker, Vasilii Katanian (1997) gave a livelier explanation: there were “no refrigerators in yurts or gramophones in the camps of shepherds”; it was just “ordinary.” Stalin had expected to see a documentary version of Pyr’ev’s 1949 musical, *Kubanskie kazaki* (The Kuban Cossacks, dir. Ivan Pyr’ev, USSR, 1949). By abandoning the recipe for the “baked cakes,” Stepanova lost her high status and ended her career making a documentary on Prokofiev.

## Two Collaborative Films about Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia’s road to socialism contrasted with the Hungarian situation, as more of the Czechoslovak population was initially receptive to

postwar Soviet overtures. Bradley Abrams details the rise of communism in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1948, offering a complex picture of how the experiences of German occupation during the war, the perceived “betrayal at Munich,” and the May 1945 liberation by the Red Army contributed to the “way in which the [Czech] Communist Party became super-patriotic, and Czech history was reinterpreted to make the communist movement the logical inheritor of the best values of the nation” (2004, 89). In postwar Czech film culture specifically, conditions were also conducive. Support for the nationalization of cinema across a wider spectrum of the film community, the “cleansing” or rehabilitation of those who had made films on behalf of the German occupier, and the return of exiled film personnel from Moscow all contributed to a prominence of communist filmmakers even before the February 1948 coup (Knapík 2015, 39–46).

Thus, it is not surprising that the only one of the late 1940s documentaries listed as “coproductions” with a codirector from the profiled country was Czechoslovakia. Vladimír Vlček, or “Volodiia” as he was known for his close connection to Soviet culture, had worked during the Czechoslovak Protectorate as a director at Lucernafilm. After the “liberation” Vlček served as an interpreter and assistant director to Ilia Kopalin for the Soviet documentary *Osvobozhdenaia Chekhoslovakiia* (Liberated Czechoslovakia, USSR, 1945), as well as translating and narrating the Czech commentary. Both Kopalin and Vlček were also key figures presenting the film in postwar Czechoslovak discourse. Writing in 1946, Vlček stressed that such a film could only have been made in a country that had not betrayed Czechoslovakia at the Munich negotiations in 1938; at the same time he highlighted the power of the Soviet Union as a distributor that could send the story of Czechoslovakia to a much wider range of countries than (small) Czechoslovakia itself (Vlček 1946). One of the most important illustrated magazines, *Svět v obrazech* (The world in images) published reports about its progress and premiere, along with Kopalin’s own short explication (Kopalin 1946). Another illustrated magazine, *Svět Sovětů* (The World of Soviets), presented Soviet filmmakers’ perspectives on the film (“Osvobozené Československo” 1946), all of which provided abundant evidence of projected interest.

Following the film’s premiere, Vlček worked in Moscow as a cultural attaché while attending VGIK film school (Šrajer 2017). He was therefore a logical choice for assistant director in Vasilii Beliaev’s co-produced documentary *Novaia Chekhoslovakiia*, which premiered on the occasion of Stalin’s seventieth birthday, December 18, 1948, and was released as *Nové Československo* in 1949 (New Czechoslovakia, dir. Vasilii Beliaev, USSR-CZ, 1948). Our intention, stated Vlček, “was to sing the wealth and beauty of a

free country and new life in it” (emphasis added, cited in Šrajter 2017, n. 2). Beliaev and five colleagues, including Vlček and the film’s music composer, were awarded Stalin Prizes.

The film’s Soviet director Beliaev began as a cameraman for *kulturfilmy* on Soviet expeditions in the 1930s, rose to the level of director during the war, and had already directed the coproduced Soviet documentary *Rumyniia* (Romania, USSR, 1947). He won the last of his five Stalin Prizes for *New Czechoslovakia*; his fourth had been for a documentary film on Lenin in 1949, which he codirected with feature-film director Mikhail Romm, accounting for the film’s documentary techniques and use of archival footage (“Beliaev, Vasilli Nikolaevich” n.d.). Giving credit to Stalin as Lenin’s successor in the late 1940s was a safe film topic that perhaps earned Beliaev this second coproduction in a brotherly country.

Traces of *New Czechoslovakia* in published commentary are suggestive. The film was reviewed positively, together with *Democratic Hungary*, in the Czech film journal *Kino* (J. D. 1950). The reviewer praised the monumental nature of the film while explaining that it was made primarily for a Soviet audience. This last qualification, perhaps, reinforces what Applebaum (2019, 9, 21, 38–39, 47–49) noted: by categorizing the film as for Soviet audiences, Czechoslovak critics could both praise the film and imply a difference from what would be expected by more sophisticated Czechoslovak viewers, exactly what having codirectors and a coproduction aimed to overcome.

In the Soviet *Iskusstvo Kino*, Kopalín commented on *New Czechoslovakia* in a collective review of 1949 documentary films that emphasized the cooperation. Kopalín recognized that these “film masters of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia” “brightly” presented the “leading role of the Czechoslovak communist party, its huge authority among the people, and the unity of the people and the party,” reinforcing the connection between the party and the people. Nonetheless, although Kopalín had praised the coproduced, color short film on the Budapest International Youth Festival in 1949 for “the warmth of unforgettable meetings, all the magnificence of the songs, the richness of colors,” he criticized *New Czechoslovakia* for the “indulgence of ethnic costumes, rituals, and dances” as detracting from the political impact of the film (Kopalín 1950, 21). Understandably, Kopalín might have seen these folkloric elements as retrograde after filming the liberation only a few years before. But “singing the beauty of the country” was central to the postwar socialist (re)construction film—and to the genre.

The film’s composer was Jan Kapr, the music director for Czechoslovak Radio in Prague during the war years. In 1945 he joined the Communist Party and after the February 1948 coup composed the first of his more

than 60 mass songs and his first “building” cantata, “V sovětské zemi” (“In a Soviet land”), winning the 1950 Smetana Prize from the city of Prague. He had gone to Moscow at the end of 1948 to work on the music for the film and was also one of the five colleagues receiving the 1951 Stalin Prize. But in 1953, according to his biographer, Jindřiška Bártová (2015), Kapr suffered large financial losses during the monetary reform and, after his son’s serious illness, decided to end any sociopolitical activity, withdrawing from public life. Regaining some public standing through national compositions, in August 1968 he dramatically protested Soviet actions in Prague, returning his Stalin Prize for *New Czechoslovakia* to the Soviet embassy and writing an open letter to Dmitri Shostakovich. The party expelled him, forbade him to teach, and prohibited the performance of his works. He spent the rest of his life composing music secluded in his Prague apartment (ibid. 2015).

Vlček avoided that fate, and also the fate of Stepanova. From 1950 he was tasked with developing cooperation with Soviet filmmakers. After *New Czechoslovakia* Vlček went on to write and direct the film *Zítřka se bude tančit všude* (Tomorrow, people will be dancing everywhere, CZ, 1952), in which a folk-dance group wins a prize at the Berlin Youth Festival; the film won a Czechoslovak prize in 1953. By using the filmed musical format that featured singing and dancing youth as integral to the plot, Vlček was able to survive the 1950s. He later shifted his coproduction talents to the West (Šrajer 2017).

The new Czechoslovakia was also profiled by the Dutch documentarian Joris Ivens, as one of three East European countries in his 1949 film of *The First Years* of socialist reconstruction. Due to the prominence of its director, the story of this film has been told in great detail (see, e.g., Waugh 2016, 354–64). Here it is useful to understand how it compares to *New Czechoslovakia* as an alternative collaborative form of socialist (re) construction documentary and how it was viewed in the context of Soviet cinematic activities at the time.

Lubomir Linhart, a Czech specialist on Soviet film, met Ivens in Moscow in the 1930s and during the Nazi occupation organized the underground plans to nationalize the Czech film industry. Becoming head of the Czech film industry after the war, he was an active promoter of meetings with “fraternal filmmakers,” including Ivens. Ivens arrived in Prague in April 1947 and made it the headquarters for his planned film on “the first years” of Bulgaria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia<sup>8</sup>; he was based there between May 1948

8 Filming also took place in Yugoslavia, but the episode was dropped after the Stalin–Tito split in 1948.



and December 1949. The film was conceived as a coproduction: costs and revenues were to be shared among the coproducing countries and the state film companies were officially listed as coproducers.<sup>9</sup> An English-language version was envisioned to broaden the audience. Ivens also saw the World Youth Festival, meant to take place in Prague that summer, as providing a logical story line (Stufkens 2016, 475).

Both Linhart and Ivens were also intimately connected to the concurrent attempt to form a World Union of Documentary that included filmmakers from both sides of the East–West divide. In Alice Lovejoy’s (2022) story of its rise and fall, the absence of Soviet filmmakers is significant. When the possibility of such a union was first discussed in 1947 at the Brussels Film Festival, the USSR did not send a delegate to the Brussels meeting although, according to Ivens, they were “following the movement with interest” (2022, 171). In July 1948 delegates met again in Mariánské Lázně in West Bohemia during the film festival, but only two very prominent Soviet feature film directors, Ivan Pry’ev and Mikhail Romm, were present (Lovejoy 2015, 89). No Soviet representatives attended the first—and only—union conference in Warsaw in October 1948. However, between these two events another East–West gathering took place in Wrocław—the World Congress of Intellectuals—in which the USSR took a leading and highly politicized role, marking an acrimonious beginning to the world peace movement. These politics could not help but taint the Western perception of the film union. By that time Linhart had also been removed from the leadership of the Czechoslovak film industry, all of which created less than ideal circumstances to realize the plan of *The First Years*.

Ivens’s film embodied the more expansive elements of the definition of documentary that had evolved at meetings of the film union, in contrast to the Soviet coproduced documentary template. Scenes were played by nonactors, fishermen, and workers; they were staged, not reported. The Bulgarian episode included only rural, peasant scenes and was disliked by the Bulgarians for that reason, whereas the 1946 Soviet–Bulgarian documentary would have most likely focused on more modern aspects of Bulgaria. The Polish episode, shot during the first half of 1948, dramatizes the story of Jadwiga, a middle-class piano teacher, who lost her husband and daughter to Nazi firing squads. In the opening shot, she appears amid the devastated ruins of Warsaw; she begins working in a steel-producing plant, eventually finding “redemption” in production, and even shows signs of returning

9 The coproducing production companies were Bulgar Film, Sofia; Statni Film, Prague; Wytwornia Filmów Dokumentalnych, Warsaw.

to piano music at the film's end. This episode, featuring an uncredited semi-professional actress, crosses into docudrama according to Schoots, one of Ivens's first biographers (2000, 217–18). In the context of coproduced documentaries, *The First Years* exemplifies the fictionalized narrative of the “reconstruction film,” similar to Hungary's *Somewhere in Europe*, shot against a realistic background.

The Czech segment most closely resembles the Soviet coproduced documentaries, with Jan Karp also composing the music. The film's centerpiece is the historical figure of Jan Hus, a fifteenth-century religious reformer. Not only was he considered by the population as among the greatest of the Czechs, but communists were able to interpret him as the first modern *revolutionary* (Abrams 2004, 100; original emphasis). The film, as described by André Stufkens (2016), progresses chronologically, from archival material on the Hussite movement to his statue, erected in 1903. The second section on interwar factory workers ends with that same statue covered in Nazi flags. In the third section the Jan Hus statue is surrounded by thousands of people celebrating the Red Army liberation. An original fourth part was prepared using Czech puppets in animation. Ivens held a working screening of the film, including the puppets and the Polish episode, for the Soviet feature film director Mikheil Chiaureli, who thought it an “astounding achievement.” But he did not like the puppets. They were like Chaplin's dictator, Chiaureli said, “a joke about things that were too significant, too dangerous” (Stufkens 2016, 485). While it is not clear when or where this screening happened, the fact that Ivens asked the opinion of Stalin's favorite director who was at that time working on *Padenie Berlina* (The fall of Berlin, USSR, 1949) is an interesting Soviet “trace” in a film not involving the USSR.

Today the film has been re-evaluated as “a transnational epic of reconstruction and nation building” and “a creditable effort at the cinematic waging of peace,” according to Thomas Waugh, Ivens's most recent English-language biographer. He applauds the film's attempt to “narrow the gap” between non-fiction and fiction film (2016, 353–54). However, in an otherwise sympathetic Soviet monograph on Ivens, published in 1964, the film is criticized for that very reason. Drobashenko compliments Ivens's focus on the new man, a remaking (*perestroika*) of human consciousness, and compares the visual images in the Bulgarian section to the poetic style of Ukrainian filmmaker Dovzhenko. But he calls the aesthetic contradictory and controversial, finding the Polish episode the most disconcerting: “for all the drama of the Polish episode, the process of Jadwiga's change of heart looked like an illustration.” And “Jadwiga herself—for all her life details—is not so much a real, documentary figure as it is a combination

image.” For that he blames Ivens’s having been “sucked into the stream of illustrative *re-enactments*” similar to that which flooded the screens of many countries, rather than “real film reporting” which should remain the “main artistic weapon” in future films (Drobashenko 1964, 90–91; original emphasis).

In March 1950, the Czechoslovak Documentary Film Board debated whether “foreign filmmakers” would be able to make effective documentary films in their country. One participant argued that the “Soviet model” of socialist realism implied a “typicization,” which required an intimate knowledge of the country being profiled that was unavailable to “foreign filmmakers.” Elmar Klos, a prominent World Film Union member, agreed. He spoke “of the pitfalls that even the most experienced and progressive documentarians encounter in foreign countries” and offered two examples: *New Czechoslovakia* and *The First Years* (Lovejoy 2022, 182–83).

## Democratic Germany

Filming a coproduction with and about Germany presented a different challenge to the Soviet filmmakers: Germany was the wartime fascist enemy, whom they defeated. The Red Army “liberation” of Berlin was an iconic moment of Soviet victory, photographically and cinematically. In the postwar years, however, the USSR shared occupation of Germany with the other allies, the US, Britain, and France. This situation represented a complicated competition in which who was reconstructing what and where was carried out in visual imagery as well as in political venues. Given the daily Cold War confrontations, especially in occupied Berlin, the documentary films played their role in using not only positive but also negative imagery of the (lack of) progress in reconstructing the ruins. For these reasons, any film that the Soviet Central Documentary Film Studio would propose to coproduce in what became the German Democratic Republic on October 7, 1949, would be a prestige product and priority.

The origins of the East Germany film studio DEFA were entangled with the USSR. The studio was licensed by the Soviet authority in Berlin on May 17, 1946. Most of the German cinema facilities were located in the Soviet occupation zone in Germany (Moine 2018, 18). DEFA boasted Hans Klering, a Communist German film actor, who was familiar with the Soviet film industry and its structure. He had returned to Berlin after thirteen years of exile in the USSR, where he had acted in several Soviet films, including as a German soldier in two of the Soviet wartime “Fighting Film” collections. He

was selected to accept the official production license for the DEFA studio (Berghahn 2005, 16–17).

Who should direct and/or codirect a Soviet–East German coproduction? In 1947 Klering had collaborated with the Soiuz Cinema Chronicle on a coproduced documentary film, *Zu einem neuen Deutschland/K novoi Germanii* (Towards a new Germany, USSR–GER, 1947). According to Seidl-Dreffke (2007), a Russian-language film version exists in the German archives with no information about whether it was distributed or to whom it was shown in either country. In 1950 Klering had asked to be released from his administrative duties and returned to being an actor. But by then a director had been chosen and a script writer found for a Soviet-initiated coproduced documentary on Germany.

The scriptwriter for what became *Demokratischekaia Germaniia* (Democratic Germany, dir. Mikola Sadkovich, USSR–GDR, 1950) was the war poet and, at the time, chief editor of the Soviet illustrated weekly magazine *Ogonek*—Alexei Surkov. He had taken an active part in the fighting at the Belorussian Front and at the Battle of Moscow; while a war correspondent for the frontline newspaper *Krasnoarmeskaia Pravda*, he wrote the lyrics for a number of war songs. His war poetry collections, translated as *Verses of Hatred* (1944) and *I Sing Victory*, based on a visit to Germany in June 1945, affirmed his patriotism in scripting a Soviet-acceptable interpretation of the war. His energetic participation in the anti-cosmopolitan campaign against suspect writers confirmed his loyalty.

The film's director also earned his wartime reputation at the Belorussian front. Mikola Sadkovich, a village boy from that region, had risen through the ranks of the Ukrainian film studios, directing two musical films by 1940. Drafted into documentary filmmaking during the war, he led the frontline film groups at the headquarters of the Belorussian partisan movement, codirecting the film of its liberation with Korsh-Sablin in 1944. The same year he joined the Communist Party. After the war, he served as the Belorussian minister of cinematography in 1946–47 and 1950–53, while in the interim he served as the editor-in-chief and director at Moscow's Central Documentary Film Studio (Deriabin 2016). Three postwar acts seem to have qualified him for selection as the director for *Democratic Germany*. First, he filmed the Nazi war trials held in Belorussia in 1946–47. Second, Sadkovich made a direct criticism of Dziga Vertov during the March 1949 party meeting at the Central Documentary Film Studios described above. Third, as minister of Belorussian cinema he purged its film studio of Jews as part of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign (Smilovitsky 2014, 233), even though he had participated in filming victims of the Holocaust.

Sadkovich reported to the film community on his 1950 visit to Berlin, five years after having entered, camera in hand, with the conquering Red Army. It is no longer “a labyrinth city,” he wrote, “where damaged blocks and streets, buried under boulders of collapsed rubble, confused routes for cars and pedestrians.” In vigorous language he describes how the city is being rebuilt, under construction, at least in the Soviet sector. And in a juxtaposition common to the filmed descriptions, Sadkovich contrasts East Berlin with the Western sector. People come to the Soviet sector to “rest from the so-called ‘art,’ delivered in West Germany and the ‘Marshall Plan.’” His prose echoes the “bright future” of a united, peaceful, and democratic Germany, as unification was still an unresolved issue in July 1950 (Sadkovich 1950, 40).

The film’s voice-over narrative holds few surprises. The edited version<sup>10</sup> from the script-writing department shows many deletions and rephrasings, both to minimize unabashed ideological statements and to credit East German socialist achievements. The film begins with a quote from Comrade Stalin: “The formation of the German democratic peaceful republic is a turning point in the history of Europe.” In the film’s seven parts, scenes of everyday life—factory workers, farmers, city dwellers—are interspersed with news footage about the new GDR personages. The peace rhetoric had its political goals: “If these two peoples [the German and the Soviet] show determination to fight for a world with the same intensity of their forces with which they led the war, then peace in Europe can be considered secured” (l. 27). Part four opens with scenes of youth, alternated with workers at shipyards, metallurgical plants, and reservoirs. Images from the works of Goethe punctuated scenes of the peasant harvest and the singing of revolutionary songs. The theme reiterated was not just peace but also unity—of the people and the party. The seventh and last part opens with the graduation ceremony at the oldest university in Germany, Jena, that includes workers and peasants, and newsreel-like reports on visits from the bloc trade representatives, now including China. The text recounts the contemporary history of the German Democratic Republic, with numbing repetition.

Reviews from both the GDR and the USSR, where the film premiered in October 1950, confirm the visual imagery suggested by the script. In contrast to Klos’s disdain for the “foreign” films about Czechoslovakia, the *Berliner Zeitung* begins:

10 Rossiiskii gosudarstvenniiy arkhiv literaturi i iskusstva (RGALI). F. 2456, op. 2, ed. khr. 115, “Demokraticheskaia Germaniia.” Diktorskii tekst 1949–50, 38 ll. Dated August 11, 1950. The 114-page archival file (ed. khr. 116) of correspondence on the film was embargoed until 2026.

Such a documentary film has perhaps never been made by a “foreigner” about another people in another country, because it required not only artistic empathy, but an original understanding, such as only agreement on the basic questions of state and social existence between two nations can produce.

The lengthy review compliments the camera, which “brings [events] to life for the viewer—and for the posterity for whom it preserves them—the great and revolutionary things that have happened since 1945.” Noting the sympathy of the image and text, the reviewer concludes: “[I]n the peace struggle of the German people, the film will be a good weapon” (H. U. E. 1950, 3).

*Neue Deutschland*, in almost a full page with four film stills, echoes the praise and “friendly sympathy” of the film. Heinz Lüdecke, the newspaper’s cultural editor, emphasizes the applause of the audience that included the GDR prime minister and the Soviet ambassador. He calls the alternating sections “dialectical,” going on to characterize that dialectic as a choice between war and peace. He ends by thanking the Soviet people for their trusting understanding and beautiful encouragement embodied in the film (Lüdecke 1950).

*Trud*, the Soviet trade union newspaper, correctly identifies the theme: “[T]he film shows the successes achieved by German workers in reconstructing the peaceful economy” (Senchakova and Chornykh 1950). The reviewers remark on the two sets of visual contrasts, not only with the German “Prussian military” but with the Anglo-American zones—lines of unemployed, hungry children. In these film clips, “ruins” are used to signify the failure of the West to rejuvenate postwar Europe in spite of “the gaudy trash of American production, delivered through the Marshall Plan.” The “ruins” are shown covered in American advertisements.<sup>11</sup>

The importance of the topic—and of the film—for the USSR is demonstrated by the lengthy review in *Iskusstvo Kino*, written by its future editor, Liudmila Pogozheva. She notes that the “building” of a “new” Germany is revealed in a multifaceted way, accentuating the most significant historical moments. She identifies the “ordinary people smiling shyly in front of the camera” as typical, telling “more about the changes in the country than any pompous or long speeches” (1951, 5). These private life stories “are combined with the story of the destiny of the whole nation, the lyrical is spliced together with the epic” (6).

11 Similar juxtaposed images of Berlin are used in the 1949 Soviet documentary *Mir pobedit voynu* (Peace will defeat war, USSR, 1949), screened in August 1949 at the All-Union Peace Conference in Moscow (Siefert 2021).

In East Berlin entire city blocks still lie in ruins and “many wounds have still not healed,” but “restoration and new reconstruction is underway.” “Americanized Germany” is a different world, of course. Despite these predictable tropes, however, Pogozheva is critical of the film’s visual material and is worth citing in full:

The idea of contrasting the two antagonistic worlds is interesting and correct. But, due to a number of reasons, the scenes showing life in West Germany turned out to be less successful, sometimes simply superficial, just mentioning the events there *in passim*. *The filmmakers had to fortify the scarce visuals with a narration*. The text is interesting. It is ironic, sharp, contains the necessary journalistic pathos. But there is too much of this text, much more than is supported by the visual material. *The visuals have nothing new or fresh, nothing seen with a sharp pair of eyes; we see only what is already familiar to us from other sources*. Still, even from this scarce material—the black market, the unemployed, the marching troops, the store windows, the absurd posters insulting the Germans—one can get a clear impression of the situation in Marshallized [sic] West Germany. (Pogozheva 1950, 6; emphasis added)

Pogozheva also disliked the film’s opening sequence, which recounts Germany’s past. “It is not innovative either. It has become a stereotype for our documentary films to tell stories of the dark and difficult past of some nation against the background of old architecture, sculpture or a landscape.” When an ancient castle among greenery or a street monument is shown the narrator says: “From here, from these old [noble] estates, some greedy hands repeatedly tried to grab other people’s belongings....” As she states, “this method can hardly be called fortunate” (*ibid.*).

The review closes by praising the film’s commitment in all its elements—the script, the camerawork, the editing, the music, the color, the narration—as delivering the message of the film about the “democratic” transformation and the longevity of the “true” image of a country and its people. However, her criticism of the visuals and the overwritten text—plus the fact that her critique was actually published in 1951—would also seem to indicate that the end of these formulaic coproduced documentaries was near.

Nonetheless, Sadkovich and two colleagues won Stalin Prizes in 1951 and the film was shown in Moscow at the first GDR “Film Festival of Friendship.” In his review for *Pravda*, Chiaureli (1952) recalled his GDR visit and his own film, *The Fall of Berlin*: It was addressed to the German people, too, who were “treacherously deceived by fascist bosses who plunged it into the abyss of

bloody war and unbelievable suffering.” The friendship of the “peace-loving peoples” of both countries was now cinematically established.

But the film’s success did not have equal outcomes for its main originators. Surkov went on to head the Soviet Writers Union between 1953 and 1959. In Stalin’s last year, however, it was Sadkovich’s turn to be chastised. Participants at the Minsk discussion of the 19th Party Congress alleged that, as the Belorussian Republic’s minister of cinematography, he “had grossly violated party discipline and failed to consider criticism from below” (“Party Aktiv Meetings” 1952, 2). He focused on writing literary fiction for the rest of his life.

### **Postwar Socialist (Re)construction through Cinematic Coproduction**

Overall, these Soviet documentaries listed as “coproductions” have formulaic components, but their individual aspects reflect local film production, personnel, and traditions. Their importance to the Soviet effort is demonstrated by the status of the directors and their Stalin Prizes. As a genre, they helped to visually document postwar reconstruction as socialist construction. The occasions of their premieres allowed for a public recognition of the “friendship” between their countries. Their production facilitated the integration of sympathetic communist filmmakers in Eastern Europe into the emerging film hierarchies of the early state-socialist period.

This format of Soviet documentary gave way to other forms of coproduced non-fiction film in the early 1950s. Notably Ivan Pyr’ev, best known for his Soviet musical films, codirected two, one with Ivens himself. New films used more named codirectors and focused on socialist internationalist projects, like the peace campaign, youth festivals, and sports competitions. After 1953, some post-Stalinist cinema projects brought together coalitions of filmmakers from across Europe, and indeed the globe, to capitalize on the networks of cooperation and extend them to sympathetic directors and locales. Again, Ivens, who had left Poland to take up a position at DEFA in 1952, was central. There he experimented with a variety of documentary formats. Most involved some type of leftist collective, whether a group of directors or a team coordinating global footage (Waugh 2016, 373–91). Experiments in socialist cinematic internationalism also expanded to include sympathetic filmmakers in the West (Siefert 2016).

With the success of Soviet cinema’s poetic rendering of personal stories about the Great Patriotic War in the late 1950s, the portrayal of postwar



reconstruction in coproductions was taken up in feature film. The Soviet–Czechoslovak coproduction *Májové hvězdy/Maiskie zvezdy* (May stars, dir. Stanislav Rostotskii, USSR–CZ, 1959) and Soviet–GDR coproduction *Piat' dnei, piat' nochei/Fünf Tage, fünf Nächte* (Five days, five nights, dir. Leo Arnshtam, USSR–GDR, 1960) show the helping hand of the Red Army as it was wished to have been. Both films have casts, editors, and cinematographers from both countries and are “fact-based” feature films representing postwar reconstruction in Eastern Europe—with Soviet assistance. *May Stars* is set in Prague in May 1945, the day after the “liberation,” and is based on a collection of Czech short stories where ordinary people meet Soviet soldiers with tears of joy or recall the memories of life before the war; even romance is seen to blossom. *Five Days, Five Nights* recounts the Red Army’s rescue of the artworks in Dresden, visually staging their heroic effort. This film premiered in March 1961; the construction of the Berlin Wall began in August. Coming full circle to the Hungarian film, *Somewhere in Europe*, these two coproductions represent the re-emergence of the postwar reconstruction film in feature film. With their socialist realist rendering of the good Soviet soldiers and their contributions to the reconstruction of Eastern Europe, the two films illustrate the continuing effort to visually reframe postwar reconstruction as a positive contribution by the USSR and the Red Army. Overall, these socialist coproductions contribute to the cinematic framing of postwar reconstruction as socialist construction, showcasing Eastern Europe as sharing in the wartime “victory of the Soviet system.”

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## 5. From Enemy Images to Friend Images after WWII, or How France Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Germany

*Matthias Steinle and Perrine Val*

### Abstract

Postwar French non-fiction cinema contributed to a rapid shift in the representation and perception of Germany. Considered as a “hereditary enemy” since the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, West Germany became in a few years the key partner of France in the construction of Europe. The signing of the Elysée Treaty in 1963 sealed this transformation of what is now referred to as the Franco-German *duo* or couple. Our chapter traces the role played by non-fiction films (newsreels, documentaries, institutional films) in the construction of the image of the other during the postwar period, in overcoming the fear of a resurgence of Nazism, and in the appearance of a feeling of closeness that gradually turns into empathy and friendship.

**Keywords:** Franco-German *duo*, images of the other, “hereditary enemy,” European friendship, non-fiction film

*I love Germany so much that I'm glad there are two of them.*

—François Mauriac<sup>1</sup>

The swiftness with which international relations were reconfigured in the immediate postwar period, from the 1945 armistice to the beginning of

<sup>1</sup> While it is not certain that the writer said this, it reflects what the majority of French people thought, including General de Gaulle (quoted from Mitterrand 1996, 20).

the Cold War, reset interstate representations, as well as those of peoples and their cultures. Yesterday's enemies sometimes became new allies in the construction of Europe. Postwar Germany was at the heart of these transformations. In the eyes of Western countries, and France, in particular, West Germany appeared to be a rampart against the communism that was spreading to the East but still represented a danger, with the fear of rearmament and the possible resurgence of Nazi ideology. French politicians were particularly wary of this. While the American and British Allies declared themselves more openly confident in Germany's ability to rebuild a democratic state and were very aware of Germany's economic and industrial role in the construction of a new Europe, the French initially tried to ensure that Germany was incapable of rebuilding solid power (Defrance and Pfeil 2012). In 1947 for example, General de Gaulle and Georges Bidault, a former member of the Resistance and then French minister of foreign affairs, took a stand in favor of the autonomy of West German industrial pools with the aim of preventing the potential resurgence of the military–industrial complex of the Third Reich and preserving the restored peace. At the same time, the postwar years also saw a resurgence of the Franco-German friendships of the interwar period.

The transition period between the end of the war, the occupation of Germany, its division, and the rapprochement between France and West Germany has been analyzed from political, diplomatic, social, cultural, and even economic perspectives (Buffet 1991; Lefèvre 1998; Maelstaf 1997), but more rarely with regard to media and audiovisual representations. However, many images have accompanied and documented the reconfiguration of what was to become the Franco-German *duo* or couple. The story of this success is accompanied by an iconography whose research has focused on media images (Koch, Schröter, and Albert 1994), particularly caricatures (Koch 2005; Delépine 1998). Cinema, on the other hand, has been of interest above all as a means of transcultural rapprochement, notably via the Franco-German film meetings (1946–53) initiated by Joseph Rovin (Defrance 2016), in which André Bazin and Chris Marker had participated as cultural facilitators (Tode 2010). The content of the moving images accompanying this rapprochement has only been analyzed in newsreels (Pfister 2014; Gröschl 1997) and in a broader political perspective, such as the construction of Europe (Clemens 2016).

From Marc Ferro's demonstrations of the importance of newsreels as a source and agent of history, notably through the television series *Histoire parallèle* (1989–2001) (Ferro 1993; Goutte, Layerle, Puget, and Steinle 2020), to more recent research, non-fiction cinema contributes to the construction

of the image of the other and constitutes a space in which this otherness can be encountered and apprehended. This chapter proposes to reconstruct the cinematographic path that linked France and West Germany in the postwar period: How did newsreels and documentaries produced in France represent Germany and the Germans? How did the image change from a Germany perceived as a “hereditary enemy” to an essential partner in the construction of Europe (Aslangul 2009)? Was it a revival of older, forgotten representations, or the creation of new, positive ones? To what extent were the images of (West) Germany being re-semanticized?<sup>2</sup> The path from the figure of the hereditary enemy to that of the friendly neighbor was long in terms of stereotypes to be overcome, but very short from a chronological point of view—about ten years to be ready to take up arms together, which seems all the more surprising given the wounds that three wars had left since 1871. The image of the enemy was anchored in people’s minds and conveyed by the media, particularly by the cinema in the 1920s and 1930s. As Claude Beylie argues, “at that time, the German was essentially the *Boche*, for whom the torments endured between 1914 and 1918 were not forgiven. He is deceitful, treacherous, cunning, and completely shaven. [...] In short, he is the Teuton in all his proud splendor” (Beylie 1991, 19).<sup>3</sup> To these clichés, which were part of the propaganda tradition of WWI, can be added those of WWII with the German SS, sustained by Hollywood films and the series *Why We Fight* (dir. Frank Capra, US, 1941–45), which reached the French screens after the Liberation (Bazin 1997). In 1948, the French still considered the Germans to be “enemy number 1” (Réalités 1956, 57).

### “Punished” Germans in the French Newsreels

The newsreels produced in France immediately after the liberation of Paris departed from these clichés. Although there is generally little information on the origins and reception of non-fiction films from this period, newsreels were subject to censorship and were produced under government control.

2 The chapter will focus on French images from German-occupied territories and, after 1949, mainly from West Germany. Images from the Soviet occupation zone were then much less accessible in France. When the GDR was created, it was primarily referred to as “the other Germany.” In the French imagination of the period, we are considering here, the terms “Germany” and “German” primarily refer to West Germany. For the cinematographic relationships between France and the GDR, see Steinle and Val 2013; Val 2021.

3 There are a few exceptions (Sauvaget 1991).



Their viewpoint was therefore not contrary to the interests of official policy.<sup>4</sup> The monopoly of *Actualités Françaises* lasted until January 1946, when private companies like Pathé Journal, *Éclair Journal*, *Actualités Fox-Movietone*, and, a little later, *Gaumont-Actualités* were allowed to resume their activities (Huret 1984, 120). Under stricter control than during the interwar period, the newsreels also faced economic difficulties, which forced them to limit their competition: they sometimes agreed to send a single team to certain events. The rushes were then made available free of charge to all the other newsreels, which edited and commented on them as they wished.<sup>5</sup>

In 1944–45, *Actualités Françaises* newsreels mostly depicted Germany with regard to the army and the destruction of the war. The Germans were less visible than the tanks or planes they drove. These machines appeared threatening and destructive, even as the Allies continued to accumulate more and more military victories. After the end of the fighting, the Germans were immediately embodied in the figure of prisoners of war (POWs). A discourse of revenge and resentment then predominated until 1946. While the war continued on German territory, German POWs captured in France took part in the first mine clearance operations (Théofilakis 2010). Newsreels,<sup>6</sup> but also films made by the army, showed groups of anonymous German prisoners being watched by Allied soldiers. The voice-over discourse generally insisted on the reversal of roles and claimed a punitive intent. The documentary *Terres hostiles* (Hostile lands, dir. Paul de Roubaix, FR, 1945)<sup>7</sup> presents mine clearance operations. The commentary states that 50,000 German prisoners are supervised by French soldiers in these very risky operations, arguing: “[T]his dangerous harvest, isn’t it they who sowed it?” Several accidents are shown with mines exploding next to the deminers, without specifying the status and nationality of the injured. The film introduces this use of prisoners as a fair reversal of the situation—the German occupier having installed these mines it seemed natural that he should remove them. However, a sense of relief prevails in the other sequences showing POWs clearing the ruins. The prisoners appear weary but the scenes show a relaxed

4 In France, under the Fourth Republic (1946–58), the French Communist Party soon became an opposition party. As a result, although the party played a major role in film exchanges with the communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it was rather rarely directly involved in the production of French newsreels or, with a few exceptions, fiction or documentary films. See Gallinari 2015.

5 This system was called “Rota” (rotation) or “pool” (Bessi 1997, 68).

6 For instance, *Nos ports martyrs* (Our martyred harbors, FR, January 18, 1945), <https://www.ina.fr/video/AFE86002948/ruines-de-boulogne-sur-mer-calais-decombres-de-marseille-video.html>.

7 <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x15g1u5>.

atmosphere. Besides, the soldiers guarding them are less and less present in the picture. The tension is thus gradually released. This normalization of the presence of POWs is confirmed in the films on the reconstruction of infrastructures produced from the second half of the 1940s onwards. Many POWs spent many years in France (Théofilakis 2014) and were therefore integrated into the local landscape. The interminable wait before the return to the homeland is the main characteristic of the rare films produced by the French army on the POW camps.<sup>8</sup> The life of the prisoners, essentially punctuated by daily chores and the few moments of entertainment, goes on slowly and the conditions of detention appear rather mild.

These films on the POW camps echo the reports that followed the return of the French soldiers, which are even more rare. Indeed, Sylvie Lindeperg shows the lack of reports on the return of French prisoners in the immediate postwar period. What she describes as an “impossible return” (Lindeperg 2000, 155) also includes the deportees. Only a few allusions were made to them, as in the *Actualités Françaises* newsreel of April 20, 1945, which commented on the images of German civilians treated with DDT-based powder: “First essential precaution, the Germans invented gas chambers for their prisoners, their victors only use them for lice.” This silence and, above all, the lack of images—in the written press and on the radio, the topic was quite present (Levy 2013, 44)—can be explained first of all by the authorities’ desire not to cause families awaiting the return of relatives held in Germany to despair, but also by the cruelty and paradoxical status of the images of the liberation of the camps, which shaped memory. These images signified the end of the war and the liberation of the prisoners, but at the same time they also showed that the Allies had arrived too late for thousands of victims and they were evidence of a break in civilization. These images announced peace, with the victory over the perpetrators, and at the same time questioned the possibility of reconciliation with those responsible. It was not before the end of April that an *Actualités Françaises* newsreel (April 27, 1945) showed the first images of camp victims. Although limited by the news format aimed at a wide audience (including children), the following issues showed more and more images that were more and more atrocious. Images of the camps were repeated by the newsreels until July 1946, for example, in the context of trials against war criminals or exhibitions such as *Crimes hitlériens* (Hitler’s crimes) (Levy 2013, 70). For this exhibition, the Ministry of Information commissioned a film from

8 *Des officiers prisonniers au camp de Géryville* (Prisoner officers at Géryville Camp, FR, 1947), <https://imagesdefense.gouv.fr/fr/des-officiers-prisonniers-au-camp-de-geryville.html>.

Actualités Françaises (Lindeperg 2000, 162): *Les Camps de la mort* (Death camps, FR, 1945),<sup>9</sup> showing concentration camps and war crime sites. Unlike the previous films, *Les Camps de la mort* was the first to present Germans who were not soldiers but civilians, and in two situations: first, clearing corpses in several places (the sequence in Langenstein is commented on as such: “All the Germans of the village work at this dreadful task. But did there have to be all these dead people for all the men in a village to be turned into gravediggers?”); second, visiting the camps (Buchenwald), which is not commented on. In contrast to the American atrocity pictures (Weckel 2012), *Les Camps de la mort* did not blame the civilian population, for example, by emphasizing the proximity of towns and villages to the camps, nor did it focus on the horrified reactions to these forced visits. The commentary, using all rhetorical means up to long moments of silence, focused on the suffering of the victims and the brutality of the crimes (Goergen 2005b, 39), while the Germans and their culture remained absent, except for an ironic remark about water access: “Life in [Bergen-]Belsen reached the limits that separate man from beast. A piece of stagnant water served all the needs of the prisoners. The Germans, as they say, are the propagators of culture and progress, and even of hygiene.” *Les Camps de la mort* also showed images of perpetrators such as Josef Kramer, commander of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, whose crude, scarred face filmed in close-up corresponds to the cliché of the brutal “Hun.” This was combined with sexist fantasies in the commentary on images of SS female guards in uniform skirts and leather boots: “His assistants, arrested with him, will also pay, the women as well as the men, as there were women, females more ferocious and sordid than the males.” In 1950, these clichés were reproduced in the newsreels about the trial against Ilse Koch, wife of the commandant of Buchenwald, nicknamed “the witch of Buchenwald.”

Nevertheless, in this first French film about the concentration camps, which is eighteen minutes long, not only are the clichés of the enemy almost absent from the images and the discourse, but so are Germany and the Germans. One reason for this absence may be that there was no defined discourse yet to explain the immeasurable brutality of the images and the crimes behind them. This vagueness reflects the complexity of explaining the Third Reich, on which the policy towards the vanquished depended: was it the culmination of an authoritarian and tyrannical culture in the wake of Bismarck and Wilhelm II that had to be punished, or was it a civilization that had gone wrong and that had to be put back on the right path? This

9 <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/afe0000275/les-camps-de-la-mort>.



Figure 5.1. *Les Camps de la mort*, Actualités Françaises, June 10, 1945. © INA.



Figure 5.2. *Les Camps de la mort*, Actualités Françaises, June 10, 1945. © INA.



Figure 5.3. *Les Camps de la mort*, Actualités Françaises, June 10, 1945. © INA.

conflict of interpretation marked the preparation of the exhibition for which the film was planned. Edgar Morin, at the origin of the project, had to fight for the exhibition to be entitled “Hitler’s Crimes” and not “German Crimes,” which reflected an anti-German stance that he rejected (Lemieux 2009, 210; Morin 2013, 84).<sup>10</sup>

### **Demonstrations in Germany: From the Fear of a Resurgence of Nazism to Claims Perceived as Legitimate**

Although the trials of war criminals that took place in 1945–46, and in particular the Nuremberg trial that was broadcast by cameras around the world (Lindeperg 2021),<sup>11</sup> helped to establish the distinction between Nazi war criminals and the German population in foreign mindsets, the discourse of French newsreels against the German people was still largely influenced by a desire for revenge and reparations. In July 1946, two reports produced by Pathé clearly conveyed this feeling of a deserved reversal of roles. *Réquisition des chevaux en Allemagne* (Requisition of horses in Germany, FR, July 10, 1946)<sup>12</sup> documented what was presented by the commentary as a restitution made as part of reparation. The report opened with the statement “Each one in his turn...,” and this attempt to reverse the roles was illustrated again two weeks later in *Foule manifestant devant l’hôtel de ville à Hambourg* (Crowd demonstrating in front of the town hall in Hamburg, FR, July 24, 1946).<sup>13</sup> Facing the people of Hamburg demonstrating against the British occupiers, the commentary concludes: “[A] number of peoples in Europe have no difficulty in imagining what would have happened if such demonstrations had taken place under the German occupation.” There were plenty of derogatory words to describe the Germans (“arrogant” and “cynical”).

Despite this enmity, which persisted after 1945, there was an absence of frontal hostile representations of the German population, and even of the prisoners of war. The most violent “anti-Boches” stereotypes were abandoned in 1945. On the other hand, the images finally revealed the relative proximity of the French and German experiences after the war: the ruins, the barracks, the precarious daily life, the difficult work on the construction sites were the same on both sides of the Rhine. The entry into the Cold War in 1947

10 See the interview with Morin in the documentary *Quand la France occupait l’Allemagne* (When France occupied Germany, dir. Tania Rakhmanova, FR, 2014), 26th minute.

11 See Lindeperg and Pitassio, in this volume.

12 [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=23642&rang=96](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=23642&rang=96).

13 [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=23668&rang=99](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=23668&rang=99).

marked even more the gradual dissolution of resentment towards Germany in the French audiovisual discourse, which was still largely controlled by the government. The representation of the demonstrations that continued in the Western occupation zones illustrated a turning point. In February 1948, Pathé documented a new demonstration in Munich.<sup>14</sup> The images of the crowd and the demands made by the demonstrators were very similar to the reports from the summer of 1946, but the commentary adopted a very different tone by relating the facts (“the workers of Bavaria [...] gathered to protest against the inadequacy of supplies”) without making any negative judgment or any reference to WWII. German workers appeared to be very close to their French counterparts who, from 1947 onwards, demonstrated regularly against food shortages and inflation. From 1947 to the official creation of the two German states in 1949, French newsreels showed the progressive appeasement of grievances against the German population, notably through the appearance of reports highlighting playful or festive (and therefore harmless) aspects of daily life in Germany.

Despite this proximity to French daily life, a clear difference between the two countries remained. While the newsreels always conveyed a hopeful message for the future of France, the future of Germany was presented as uncertain and threatened. When Konrad Adenauer was elected the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in September 1949, *Actualités Françaises* entitled its report *Le quatrième Reich: l'Allemagne de l'Ouest* (The Fourth Reich: West Germany, FR, September 22, 1949).<sup>15</sup> The montage used archive footage from the rise of the Nazi party, while the commentary was listing the names of several chancellors of the Weimar Republic, wondering whether Adenauer would follow their paths or not. After shots of Hitler being greeted by the crowd, the report concluded with a map of Germany still divided into four occupation zones (the FRG is not mentioned) with the question: “For the French, all answers are unfortunately possible to the question so often asked: what will tomorrow’s Germany be made of?” This rhetoric is contrary to the discourse that accompanied French political life, even though it was also marked by the difficulties encountered by the French Fourth Republic. Despite this fatalistic presentation of Germany’s future, the fear of a possible resurgence of Nazism had nevertheless disappeared.<sup>16</sup>

14 *Grèves* (Strikes, FR, February 18, 1948), [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=24594&rang=448](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=24594&rang=448).

15 <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/afe85003235/le-quatrieme-reich-l-allemande-l-ouest>.

16 Newsreels sought to report on the process of the “denazification” of the German population through occasional reports—*École des professeurs de denazification* (Denazification teachers’



Figure 5.4. *Le Quatrième Reich: l'Allemagne de l'Ouest*, Actualités Françaises, September 22, 1949. © INA.

### Communist Threat Takes Over: Berlin Blockade as Turning Point

The end of the 1940s coincided above all with the arrival of a new threat, that of communism. The FRG appeared to be in a perilous situation because of its direct geographical proximity to the countries under Soviet influence. In the autumn of 1947, the same images of refugees from the East circulated in several newsreels (*Actualités Françaises*,<sup>17</sup> Gaumont<sup>18</sup>). The comments showed compassion for the Germans, while still holding them responsible for the problem. Although these reports emphasized the distress of the refugees, the border with the Soviet zone appeared relatively porous. This representation changed rapidly in the following months. Until the blockade of Berlin at the end of June 1948, the (inter)German border areas were increasingly seen as the scene of all kinds of clandestine activities, such as black

school, FR, 1947), *Dans Berlin les jeux d'enfants eux-mêmes se dénazifient* (In Berlin the children's games themselves are being denazified, FR, 1949)—the titles of which in fact conceal the resumption of banal daily life.

17 *Le drame des émigrants clandestins* (The drama of the illegal emigrants, FR, October 30, 1947), <https://www.ina.fr/recherche?q=drame%20%C3%A9migrants%20clandestins>.

18 Report from the week from October 30 to November 6, 1947, [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=207017&rang=350](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=207017&rang=350).

market and prostitution.<sup>19</sup> The images of prostitutes filmed in secret and the shots of illegally sold goods were accompanied by a resigned commentary. In November 1947, Pathé produced a report on the smuggling that had developed at the crossroads of Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium.<sup>20</sup> The music was much more alarming, and the camera in a patrol car even captured the chase of the smugglers through the forest. The newsreel was thus making a distinction between the excesses caused by social misery, commented on with fatalism and distance, and the incidents that took place at the border, staged in the manner of an action film (handheld camera, dramatic music). Once again, these images of misery echoed some French documentaries revealing the precariousness of some poorly housed people. Nevertheless, most of the French newsreels filmed in France adopted a very optimistic discourse. For instance, the report *Ci-gît Le Havre* (Here lies Le Havre, FR, March 1945)<sup>21</sup> on France's most destroyed city started with the ruins, but the commentary also announced the rebirth of the city to come. The final shot showed a cloudy sky with the sun shining through as the announcement of a bright future.

In July 1948, the sky was also the focus of the Berliners locked in by the Soviet blockade, a sky that was crossed by American planes providing supplies to the population, but which was again synonymous with uncertainty for the future. An *Actualités Françaises* newsreel<sup>22</sup> highlighted the prowess of the planes. The point of view adopted was mainly that of the airmen flying over the "dead city." A few months later, a Gaumont newsreel report emphasized the precariousness of the Berliners and, in contrast, promoted the airlift to which the French contributed.<sup>23</sup> The ten months of the blockade brought about a shift in the way the German population has been portrayed. In reports produced from 1945 onwards, Germans in Allied-occupied areas were generally filmed as a crowd. While some reports focused on the particular situations of a smaller group of people, no single individual stood out. The German crowds, still perceived as threatening

19 The same shots appear in several newsreels of December 18, 1947: *Visages de l'Allemagne* (Faces of Germany, FR), [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=207086&rang=359](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=207086&rang=359); *Les gares d'Allemagne* (German railway stations, FR), <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/afe85002854/les-gares-d-allemaigne>.

20 *Contrebande* (Smuggling, FR, November 12, 1947), [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=24463&rang=353](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=24463&rang=353).

21 <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/afe86003004/ci-git-le-havre>.

22 Released on July 29, 1948, <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/afe85002082/1948-le-blocus-de-berlin>.

23 Newsreels from October 21 to 28, 1948, [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=207434&rang=532](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=207434&rang=532).



during the first demonstrations against the Allied occupation in 1946, dissolved momentarily during the blockade of Berlin. The reports produced between June/July 1948 and May 1949 show empty urban spaces. There was thus a kind of break in the representation of the Germans, who seemed to disappear temporarily from the public space and the screen, as confirmed by the end of the blockade. On May 17, 1949, *Éclair Journal* documented the event through the reopening of rail and road traffic.<sup>24</sup> The report started with the first train from Frankfurt am Main to Berlin. Even though a crowd has gathered on arrival, there was no doubt about its harmlessness and pacifism: it was filmed from above, almost motionless, and the commentary speaks of simple onlookers.

In June, a report showed the revival of life in Berlin.<sup>25</sup> The emphasis here was on the abundance of foodstuffs and the crowds in the market. Although the images showed mostly older women, the commentary spoke of “young Berliners,” and the report ended with shots of a little girl biting into an orange. These images reflect the renewal of the German population with images of young people who will become the symbol of a new Germany. Thus, a re-semanticization of the “German crowd” takes place, which no longer echoes the crowds cheering Hitler. Here, they stage the emergence of a new generation carried by a surge of life and devoid of any threatening dimension. The Cold War has transformed the geopolitical stakes in Europe and the communists have become the new enemies, of which the people of West Berlin have been victims. The reversal of representations, this clear shift from a foreign German people to an endearing Berlin population, was part of this crystallization of new anti-communist political alliances. Moreover, there is also a re-semanticization of the bomber. Whereas it embodied military power and/or violence until the end of the war, during the blockade it appeared as the tool of supply and the symbol of the resistance of the free part of the world.

### **Creation of the FRG: The Fear of a “Fourth Reich” with Images of the Third One**

The crises in Berlin and especially the 1948–49 airlift enabled the creation of images of “friends in solidarity” anchored in the present. Nevertheless, fears

24 *Levée du blocus de Berlin* (Berlin blockade lifted, FR, May 17, 1949), [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=229388&rang=691](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=229388&rang=691).

25 *Berlin après le blocus* (Berlin after blockade, FR, June 29, 1949), [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=25634&rang=717](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=25634&rang=717).

and anxieties remained and shaped the representation of Germany in 1949, when the occupation zones in the West and East gained state independence. Although the German was no longer frightening, a Germany that was regaining its economic power evoked images of the enemy of the past, as evidenced by the French newsreels of that year. The *Actualités Françaises* newsreel of March 1949 featured a report entitled *Allemagne année 4* (Germany Year 4) in which the current situation was compared with that of 1945. Without explicitly returning to Nazi Germany, multiple allusions were made to it, including images of Berlin in ruins that emphasize the devastation of the war and the misery of the inhabitants—with images of the *Trümmerfrauen* clearing the ruins. The commentary emphasized that economic recovery was based on civilian consumerism. Nevertheless, by pointing out that the statistics already attested to “a fourth economic and industrial Reich,” it set postwar Germany in the continuity of the Third Reich. The newfound economic and industrial power was frightening, and the concluding commentary called for its control: “For the Germans, certainly the right to live and even to live well, but for their neighbors, the right to security, a security that it is time to ensure.” These fears were not translated visually—there were only symbolic images of the economic recovery, such as well-filled shop windows. The French report thus reproduces a central motif of American Cold War propaganda to convince the West German population of the superiority of the market economy over the Soviet model.<sup>26</sup> Although this was not explicitly mentioned in *Allemagne année 4*, the figures and images referred to West Germany, which in a few months’ time became the FRG, thus signifying that in the future, for France, “Germany” would refer to the Western, capitalist part.

The fear of a “Fourth Reich” was at the heart of an *Éclair* newsreel report of April 1949 entitled *Amis comme avant ...* (Friends as before ...) which, with its anti-German rhetoric and historical iconography, exemplified the stereotypes of the hereditary enemy. The commentary explained that the “rapid denazification procedure” of the creation of the FRG and its admission to the Marshall Plan “probably finds a kind of justification in the mystery surrounding East Germany,” which is illustrated by an image of Stalin. The subsequent commentary expressed the fears:

but so soon after the Nuremberg trial, which may not have removed all the dangers of Germanism, the haste with which the serious decision

26 For example, the American short film from the Documentary Film Unit (DFU), *Zwei Städte* (Two cities, dir. Stuart Schulberg, FRG, 1950) (Steinle 2003, 40), <https://www.bpb.de/mediathek/video/206883/zwei-staedte/>.

was taken to integrate the Germany of Bismarck, Wilhelm II, and Adolf Hitler into future Europe is cause for concern.

The pictures showed the main defendants at the Nuremberg trial, then Wehrmacht soldiers marching with Nazi flags, portraits of Bismarck with a *Pickelhaube* helmet, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and a speech by Hitler shouting “Sieg Heil,” coupled with images of advancing German tanks and guns in action. The sequence was accompanied by the sound of gunfire. The iconography was anchored in the past while completely omitting the present. To convey the fear of a warlike Germany and make the danger palpable, this newsreel used images from the past combining shots of Prussian militarism with Nazi and World War II propaganda images, visually very effective. The commentary concluded by pushing the Germanic threat to the extreme: “may the future calm these fears and may the Washington agreements not one day result in a few new Bikinis *made in Germany*,” illustrated by an aerial view of an atomic bomb explosion. This argument linked the German fascist past to the American atomic bomb in words and images, and merged the fear of the defeated hereditary enemy with that of the dominant winner. In 1948, out of “a hundred French people interviewed, thirty-four named the Germans as their main enemy, thirty-two the Russians, seven the Italians, six the Americans,” but in “1954, the situation had changed: out of a hundred French people, twenty-seven named the Russians, twenty-two the Germans, ten the Americans” (Réalités 1956, 57). Thus, this report from April 1949 echoed the evolution of the feeling of threat in the example of the two “enemies” on which communists and Gaullists agreed: Germany and the United States.

It is also interesting to note that the argumentation of the *Éclair* newsreels corresponds both discursively and visually to the main documentary strategy of GDR propaganda to delegitimize West Germany. The anti-fascist discourse returns to Germany’s imperialist and Nazi history to link the FRG to the Third Reich in terms of its economic and political elites as well as its militarism with a visual strategy that is as simple as effective: by presenting a picture of a high military in Nazi uniform or an industrialist with Hitler and then a picture of the same with Chancellor Adenauer a few years later, the message is clear: Third Reich = FRG, while in the GDR the lessons of the past have been learned.<sup>27</sup> About *Allemagne année 4* and *Amis comme avant*,

27 This is the principle of the DEFA compilation films of the 1950s (Steinle 2007; Maeck 2011). A sequence comparable to that of *Amis comme avant...* justifies the construction of the Wall as an “anti-fascist rampart” in Karl Gass’s *Schaut auf diese Stadt* (Look at this city, GDR, 1962) (Steinle 2003, 199).

analyzed in *Histoire parallèle* by Klaus Wenger and Marc Ferro, the latter explains (in the role of a former witness) that these images of enemies were not only explained by the French's fear of Germany, but also by anger and a feeling of injustice that the Americans were already helping West Germany while France was not yet rebuilt.<sup>28</sup> According to Ferro, the communist vote at the time was not because people "were communists, but because they thought it was a possible barrier to this movement to integrate Germany."

West Germany's rearmament caused fears. At a meeting of the foreign ministers of France, Great Britain, and the United States, Robert Schuman replied with a refusal, which was echoed in the *Éclair Journal* in 1950<sup>29</sup>: "The rearmament of Germany is being considered. Robert Schuman said no! Our foreign minister, like all Frenchmen, remembers the German soldiers too well," illustrated by images of monuments to French resistance fighters and soldiers from the First and Second World Wars, as well as images of mourning women accompanied by a funeral march (Pfister 2012, 368). In contrast, the Pathé newsreel (no. 42/1950) answered the title question "Should Germany Be Rearmed?" in the affirmative because the GDR would constitute a greater threat. The report also showed images of the war and the destruction by the Germans, but it added images of the capitulation with surrendering Wehrmacht soldiers, Allied triumph parades, and the destruction of the Reich Chancellery. The images of the enemy were thus deactivated by the iconography of its defeat while the commentary pointed to communist East Germany as the new danger.<sup>30</sup>

In the early 1950s, however, this fear of West Germany gradually subsided. Although the trauma of the past sometimes reappeared in the images from Germany, particularly with the return of prisoners of war, the tensions of the Cold War and the arrival of refugees from the East gave rise to a new fear, that of the communist regimes. Most of the French newsreels on the FRG took everyday events as their topics: sports competitions, local festivals, or animals in zoos. Germany appeared more in the diversity of its regions than as a political power. But between the lines, history remained present, as host Marc Ferro and guest Klaus Wenger note in an episode of the TV show *Histoire parallèle* entitled *France–Germany: From Hostility to Friendship*.<sup>31</sup>

28 *Histoire parallèle 500: 1949: quelle Allemagne pour l'Europe?* (1949: Which Germany for Europe?, FR/DE, March 6, 1999) with Klaus Wenger.

29 *Conférence des trois au Waldorf de New York, Etats-Unis* (Conference of three at the Waldorf in New York, US, *Éclair Journal*, no. 38, FR, 1950).

30 *Faut-il réarmer l'Allemagne?* (Should Germany be rearmed?, Pathé Journal, no. 42, FR, 1950).

31 *Histoire parallèle 627: France-Allemagne: de l'hostilité à l'amitié* (August 11, 2001) with Klaus Wenger.

The two historians compare the cross-representations of the two countries in 1951, noting that German newsreels are “a bit fictitious” while French newsreels are “more real and more political” in their representation of Germany. In every report, even if it was not explicitly political like reports from music festivals (Bayreuth, Mainz), the past was—perhaps cautiously, but clearly—present. According to Wenger, in France “we are not going to forget the past.” This presence of the past, according to Ferro, was “very politicized,” whereas “Germany does not do politics, it rebuilds itself.”

This reconstruction involved a rapprochement with France and an integration into Europe. To display this, the reports used patterns that were generally well established in political communication, in particular two patterns that will symbolize the process: the handshake (Pfister 2012, 267) and the train. During official meetings between politicians, the handshake symbolizes peace and a relationship at eye level, as shown by the reports on the meetings between Schuman and Adenauer in Luxembourg (Éclair Journal, no. 37/1952) or Pierre Mendès Frances and Adenauer (Gaumont Actualités, no. 44/1954) (Pfister 2012, 264). But for this pattern to become truly iconic and *the* symbol of the Franco-German couple, it was necessary to wait for the return of General de Gaulle to the political scene and the de Gaulle–Adenauer couple. The train as the symbol of modernity, mobility, and exchange is, in the Franco-German context, often combined with the crossing of the border. For example, there are images of young people going to their neighbor’s house, or of freight trains, often carrying coal, which customs officers let pass with a big smile, as in the programmatically titled report *L’Europe en marche* (Europe on the move, Éclair Journal, FR, August 1953).

Most of the promotion documentaries for a united Europe<sup>32</sup> even deliberately left Germany in the background, even if Franco-German reconciliation is the frame of reference in the background (Tode 2016, 253, 288). This was the case of *E ... comme Europe* (E ... as Europe, dir. Géza von Radványi, FR, 1952),<sup>33</sup> a French film produced by the Marshall Plan about an international meeting of European youth on the banks of the Rhine near the Loreley. The film took place in a setting directly associated with romantic Germany, but without Germany and Germans being mentioned or represented (Tode 2016, 269–73; Fritsche 2018, 139–41).

The Paris Agreements, which led to FRG’s rearmament and integration into NATO in 1955, put an end—at least in French newsreels and

32 See Clemens and Goergen 2016. On the filmography of French productions, see Tode 2016, 290–91; Fritsche 2018, ch. 5, “US Policy into Film: European Integration.”

33 <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/vddog016194/e-comme-europe>.

documentaries—to this regular resurgence of fear of Germany and avoidance. The newsreels illustrated this turning point with plenty of frank handshakes between the smiling and serene representatives of the two neighboring countries.<sup>34</sup> The commentary described West Germany's entry into NATO without any objections and the accompanying music suggested a complete happy ending. The *Éclair Journal*,<sup>35</sup> the most critical and even hostile newsreel towards Germany, put it this way:

If it took ten years for the first conference of the Western European Union to be held in Paris, it was because it was as difficult for some to overcome their victory [on the screen, a shot of Antoine Pinay] as it was for the others to overcome their defeat [a shot of Konrad Adenauer]. And once this step has been taken, West Germany's entry into the Council of the Atlantic Alliance must be only the first step, because Europe will thus take shape not only for defense purposes, but above all with the future idea of a truly constructive community.

The NATO membership of the former enemy was seen as a success of the European integration process and a symbol of the future of a common Europe (Pfister 2012, 178).

A fictionalized documentary financed by the United States Information Service (USIS) but presented as a French production sums up the evolution of enemies to friends: *Un Français à Berlin* (A Frenchman in Berlin, dir. George Freedland, FR, 1955)<sup>36</sup> followed a young French teacher appointed to the French school in Berlin to replace a colleague who has retired. At first, the young man is shown oscillating between curiosity and distance towards the city and its inhabitants. While he expected to find his older colleague happy to come back to France, the opposite was true: his colleague told him how sad he was to leave his position. In several flashbacks, he recalled Berlin's recent history, the hardships it has endured and showed his attachment to his students and, through them, to the people of Berlin. Finally, the young teacher was impressed by his new environment and moved by the resilience of the students. The film concluded with a quote from Voltaire on the blackboard: "Honest freedom lifts the spirit, slavery

34 *L'entrée de l'Allemagne dans l'Alliance Atlantique (O.T.A.N.)* (The entry of Germany into the Atlantic Alliance (NATO), Gaumont Journal, FR, 1955), [https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id\\_doc=211074&rang=2099](https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=211074&rang=2099).

35 *Première conférence de l'Union de l'Europe Occidentale à Paris* (First Western Union conference in Paris, *Éclair Journal*, no. 20, FR, 1955).

36 <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/vdd0916220/un-francais-a-berlin>.

makes it grovel,” as if to reaffirm that France and (West) Germany were now on the same side and fighting together for freedom. Although the new communist enemy was never mentioned by name, it was the one targeted. These images of harmony were to increase in number over the following years and decades.

## Conclusion

The path from images of enemies to images of friends took place in three stages linked to international political developments. At the end of the war and in the immediate postwar period, a discourse of revenge dominated. The aim was to make the aggressor participate in repairing the destruction (mine clearance) and in reconstruction, and to make him pay for his actions. But open hatred or the use of clichés of the hereditary enemy (the *Boche* of WWI) were quite rare, which is surprising, given the destruction and crimes committed by the Germans. The latter were embodied by prisoners of war and the civilian population who, in the images, looked like the victims of war. The commentary then had to remind the audience of their guilt. A second stage began with the Cold War, when communism and the USSR became the new “enemy number one.” The crises and especially the 1948–49 Berlin blockade accelerated the transformation and also led to a re-semanticization of images previously linked to fascism and war. Thus, German civilians became the victims—the preferred German self-image up to today, the crowd of civilians was no longer cheering a dangerous leader, Allied planes and bombers no longer dropped bombs but brought food. This “civilization” of the war machine also pacified the image of the Germans, who benefited from it. At the same time, history was still present. In 1949, when Germany regained its (relative) state independence, fears were expressed through the use of images of the enemy and a historical discourse recalling the wars. These, however, were archival images, images from the past. There was no updating of the iconography, nor any new images of the enemy. From 1952 onwards, these images and this discourse disappeared and were replaced by a representation of the Germans and Germany as a friend, which was established in documentary forms until 1955. The strategy to achieve this was twofold: on the one hand, to leave out images referring to the Nazi past and, on the other hand, to offer new images that are part of a transnational framework. The most important images were related to youth as a bearer of hope and future with images of young people crossing borders and participating in the construction of Europe. Later, when de Gaulle returned to power,

the image of him with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer became the emblematic iconography of Franco-German friendship, finding its continuity—not only, but also—visually with the duo of Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand.

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# Section 2

Reconstructing Realities



Reconstructing a widely devastated continent was a huge effort that, in different ways, almost all European countries undertook in the postwar decade. This epochal reconstruction not only required concretely rebuilding cities, infrastructures, and industrial sites, but also meant establishing new political institutions and economic systems, facing widespread conditions of poverty and unemployment, supporting a mass-scale diffusion of education, public health, and improvement of living standards. Everywhere, postwar reconstruction went beyond the mere material recovery from the conflict. It was seen as the opportunity to reconfigure society, to even refund the nation in some cases, and to reimagine the future according to certain ideals and values. As the essays in this second section demonstrate, postwar non-fiction cinema participated actively in this process of shaping European societies, thus revealing its effective agency on reality in multiple ways.

From a continent-wide perspective, international agencies keenly exploited documentary films to reach large audiences and frame postwar reconstruction within supranational networks of power and influence. The US film campaign to support their European Recovery Plan is probably the most famous case. As Maria Fritsche and Dennis Pohl delineate in their essay by integrating social theory, architectural history, and film analysis, the Marshall Plan films promoted a new vision of public space from both an urban and a social viewpoint, depicting how to rebuild European cities as well as how to live in them, following a modern, capitalist lifestyle. Complementary to this transnational perspective, the local gaze is instead at the core of Alexander Stark's contribution. Examining the films made by Elisabeth Wilms, which portray everyday life and reconstruction in postwar Dortmund, he argues how cinema, moving from "grassroot" modes of production and reception, contributed to building the city's cultural memory and its communitarian identity.

Whether it be the stage for parades, rallies, and other collective events, or instead the place for individual activities and everyday life, public space and its perception and uses were strongly influenced by contemporary regimes of visibility. Johannes Praetorius-Rhein and Andrea Průchová Hružová focus on how, in non-fiction images east and west of the so-called Iron Curtain, people's bodies, gestures, and movements are linked to the uses and representations of public space according to contrasting paradigms. By showing and regulating behaviors, rules, and "choreographies" for the public scene, these films inscribed precise ideologies within the realm of collective publicness.

Semi-public spaces like private companies or factories, and even domestic space like houses, were often under the gaze of cinema, testifying to the

entanglement of public and private dimensions—the former often dominating over the latter. Factories as places of productivity and labor were differently framed and represented in the West and in the East. Comparing Italian and Czechoslovak examples, Lucie Česálková and Simone Dotto argue that industrial documentaries articulate the rhetoric of men and women's labor, work productivity, and the cult of efficiency, reflecting opposing political and economic models. After the war's large bombardments, the need for houses, especially for the working class, was an urgent matter all nations had to face. In Italy, France and Germany, the housing crisis—which would continue far beyond the first postwar decade—was the central topic of numerous films, as explained by Francesco Pitassio, Johannes Praetorius-Rhein, and Perrine Val. Large film campaigns were launched by supranational institutions as well as national governments to promote housing programs, to show the citizens the efforts undertaken, the scale and the success of the reconstruction, while urging viewers to join these efforts by settling down, working efficiently, and doing their share for the common good.

Ultimately, all the films discussed in this section aimed to contribute to a new future for postwar societies by imagining and depicting it as a bright time ahead. Even when recalling the war, they do not indulge in the traumatic dimensions that the event has left on the continent, but rather move quickly to underline the fast recovery on its way, the newly found collaborations among the nations, the success of the political model—the capitalist or the communist—portrayed in the images. The war almost offers the opportunity for a new start, and postwar time becomes synonymous, in these ideologically optimistic movies, with prosperity and social cohesion.

## 6. “Room to Move and Space to Play”<sup>1</sup>

Architecture and the Marshall Plan’s Cinematic  
Reconfiguration of Space

*Maria Fritsche and Dennis Pohl*

### Abstract

This chapter examines the interrelation between the Marshall Plan (MP) films and the MP’s building and exchange programs for European architects. By analyzing depictions of architecture in the films, the chapter demonstrates how the Marshall Planners aimed to reconfigure public and private space by linking modern architecture to Western liberalism, thereby utilizing older Bauhaus ideals.

**Keywords:** Marshall Plan films, modern architecture, Cold War, Bauhaus, governance

### Introduction

Popular memory associates the Marshall Plan (MP) first and foremost with the rebuilding of war-devastated Europe. The MP film *Houen Zo* (Steady, dir. Herman van der Horst, NL, 1951) exemplifies this trope. *Houen Zo* shows how the city of Rotterdam, which had been heavily bombed by Nazi Germany in 1940, is being rebuilt with Marshall aid. The documentary opens with church bells ringing and an establishing shot of a church ruin whose tower is clad in scaffolding. The camera then moves inside the roofless ruin. It pans across the remains, as if to measure the scope of destruction, and then zooms in on a one-legged man on crutches who slowly moves across what was once the church floor, flat slabs of stone with grassy patches in

<sup>1</sup> *Somewhere to Live* (dir. Jacques Brunius ECA 1951). Nr. 3 of the six-part series *The Changing Face of Europe* (1951). Produced for ECA by Wessex Productions.



between. As the man stops to survey his surroundings, the camera imitates his gaze, tilting upwards to reveal birds nesting in the wall—a symbol of life that sparks hope. The silence is the most striking feature of the opening scene. Occasionally punctuated by ringing bells, chirping birds, and the muffled noise of children playing in the distant, the sound of silence creates a peaceful atmosphere that contrasts with the ruins.

The shouts of a couple of boys playing in the ruins interrupt the silence and capture the man's—and the spectator's—attention. As soon as the boys have entered the scene, the pace of the film picks up. The camera follows them on their journey through a city filled with bustling activity. The film's accelerating pace seems to mirror the energetic stride of the city dwellers who go about their daily business as if the war had never happened. Along with the pace, the sound level also increases, reaching a peak in the final scene, which shows a machine ramming pillars into the ground with a deafening sound. Swift cuts between the ramming machine and shots of newly erected buildings produce the impression that the ramming machine is pushing the buildings out of the ground. *Houen Zo* conveys optimism as it presents visible proof that cities and lives can be rebuilt even after devastating catastrophes.



Figure 6.1. New buildings are being stomped out of the ground in Rotterdam. Film still from *Houen Zo* (*Steady*, dir. Herman van der Horst, NL, 1951).

Rebuilding infrastructure, production facilities, and buildings destroyed during the war was a key aim of the European Recovery Program (ERP), as the Marshall Plan was officially called. *Houen Zo* argues that the ERP not only brought the city back to life but produced a modern and even better version of Rotterdam. The MP did not merely change the outer appearance of Rotterdam or Europe as a whole; it also helped to transform the ideological and societal structure of Western Europe.

The ERP applied a range of measures to help crisis-ridden Europe to become "independent of extraordinary outside economic assistance" by the time the four-year program was scheduled to end in summer 1952.<sup>2</sup> Apart from delivering material goods, machines, and vehicles to revive production, the MP also provided the Europeans with financial aid and loans, technical assistance, and expert advice. The ERP was not a charitable action but sprang out of America's interest to protect and defend its position in the world. For the US policymakers, a strong liberal-capitalist system based on free trade was the key to lasting economic and political stability at home and abroad. Communist expansion in China or Eastern Europe threatened this goal. To revive international trade, the US needed an economically strong Europe (Hogan 1987; Milward 1984; Pollard 1985).

As both the US and the Soviet Union competed for global dominance, Europe became a coveted object. The ERP served not just as a means to rebuild, but also to reform and modernize the European economy along liberal-capitalist principles. The "Grand Design" that the Marshall Planners envisioned aimed at nothing less than a complete overhaul of Europe's economic, fiscal, and political structures to create what the Americans defined as the "free" world. This plan was, as Michal Hogan (1987, 22) argued, inspired by the desire "to remake Western Europe in the likeness of the United States" with the goal of establishing an alliance of like-minded societies that shared the same values. Architecture played a key role in this Grand Design. For the architects, city planners, and technicians working in the employ of the ERP, the war-devastated continent presented the perfect drawing board to implement their visions. The MP provided them with the necessary monetary and political power, while the new building methods developed in the US during the Second World War guaranteed fast and cost-efficient construction, which was key to the success of the MP. These architects, as this chapter illustrates, constructed the "free" world both literally and metaphorically.

The MP and the structural reforms it required could only succeed if the program was supported by a substantial part of the European population.

2 *Economic Cooperation Act of 1948*, Public Law 472, 80th Congress, 2nd session.

The newly established Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), which was tasked with implementing the ERP, adopted a multipronged approach to win the consent of the Europeans. The efforts comprised a vast media campaign that utilized films, radio broadcasts, newspapers, and posters. Film was considered a particular influential instrument of propaganda and thus given high priority. (Fritsche 2018, 5, 196–97). The campaign's goal was to counter European skepticism by illustrating how the restructuring of economy would result in lasting economic growth, prosperity, and peace (Ellwood 1998; Ellwood 2003; Bischof and Stiefel 2009; Fritsche 2018). Technical assistance and educational programs specifically targeted industries, workers, and farmers to modernize production (Price 1955, 107–8, 336; Boel 1997; Kleinschmidt 2008). In addition, the ECA organized exchange programs and study tours for journalists, trade unionists, students, and selected professionals to impress them with US living and production standards. All measures were intended to illustrate the advantages of the liberal-capitalist system to curb the influence of communism amid rising Cold War tensions.

This chapter explores the interrelation between the MP films and the ECA study tours for European architects. These study tours introduced the European experts to modern American standardized building methods, which again were strongly informed by the ideas of émigré Bauhaus architects who had fled Europe before the war. We seek to demonstrate how the MP reconfigured public and private space, both through the sponsored building projects as well as through the MP films which promoted the US efforts of changing Europe's physical and ideological landscape. What role did modern architecture play in the MP films? Which visual and narrative strategies did the filmmakers employ to link the ERP-sponsored building projects to the ideology of liberalism?

The aim of this chapter is to make visible the process through which norms are inscribed into space. We will also reflect on the larger societal effect of the MP, not in terms of economic impact, but in terms of its role in the development of Western society. Using Gilles Deleuze's concept of "societies of control" we discuss how the MP building projects ushered in the end of disciplinary power that became more and more associated with authoritarian regimes. We argue that the Marshall Plan's architectural Grand Design promoted a new mode of control—a more fluid form of control Deleuze (1995, 178) described as "free-floating control" because it was dynamic and adaptable.

The chapter thus connects architectural history, social theory, and film analysis. The first section describes how the architectural ideas of the Bauhaus school, brought to the US by European émigrés, came to fruition

through the needs of the US war industry. It explains how these ideas were reimported to Europe after the war through the ERP, supported by professional networks of architects. In the second part we analyze how the ERP-sponsored housing projects utilized these methods to transform European postwar society. Using the example of West Germany, we show how the government adopted the Grand Design's promise of freedom and prosperity to push for the building of modern family homes as defense against totalitarian, disciplinary control. The third part, finally, illustrates how the information films that were produced to promote the MP to the Europeans helped to pave the ideological ground to realize these ERP projects.

### **The Marshall Plan's Grand Design for Europe and Its European Roots**

The MP film *Somewhere to Live* (dir. Jacques Brunius, ECA, 1951) demonstrates how innovative building methods developed in the US could answer the enormous need for housing in Europe. The film formed part of the six-part film series *The Changing Face of Europe*, which was, unlike most locally produced MP films, produced directly by the ECA headquarters in Paris. The fact that another US agency, the US Information Services (USIS) also produced information films on housing illustrates the importance given to this topic. The USIS operated under the auspices of the US State Department and was tasked with promoting the US abroad (Tobia, 2008). It competed with the ECA, but was also its most important cooperation partner in disseminating propaganda abroad.

Both the MP film *Somewhere to Live*, as well as the USIS film *Ein Dach über dem Kopf* (A roof over your head, dir. Eva Kroll, FRG, 1950) address the widely held belief that American industry sacrifices quality for quantity and speed. They illustrate that the American construction mode is a carefully planned, but swift operation. The films visualize an efficient building process, but also promote democratic cooperation by showing how architects and planners or, as in *Ein Dach über dem Kopf*, a layman and building engineer, discuss designs and building materials. The European audiences who still think of construction in terms of manual brick laying are introduced to the use of prefabricated elements and mobile cement mixer trucks. The pressing need for housing, the film argues, can only be solved by new modes of building which speed up the process.

This is exemplified by the opening scene of *Somewhere to Live* which depicts a young French couple searching in vain for a home in the destroyed

city of Caen in northern France. Somebody directs the couple to an old ruin where they immediately start building their new home.



Figure 6.2. Amateur builders trying to build a home on their own. Film still from *Somewhere to Live* (dir. Jacques Brunius, ECA, 1951).

Being anything but construction workers, the protagonists struggle with the lack of available material and with their lack of skills. Cutting from the two amateur builders in France to US-trained European experts discussing materials and styles, the editing marks the important transition from craft to mass production. Instead of burdening the layman with the impossible task of finding the right materials and right design, modules and prefabricated parts provide the needy with readymade and affordable homes which can easily be adapted to individual needs and local styles. To reassure the audiences that modern architecture does not supplant local traditions, the film advocates the use of locally sourced materials, such as timber or bricks, for walls and roofs to give the buildings a feeling of familiarity. Structure and floor, however, are made of reinforced concrete to speed up the construction process. In other words, as the voice-over in *Somewhere to Live* promises, the city planners strive at “getting the best of old and new”. While the façades incorporate local traditions, the building’s structural elements are standardized and prefabricated—a formula that characterizes the Grand Design for Europe as a whole: outwardly familiar, but radically reformed at the core.



Figure 6.3. Prefabricated elements speed up the building process. Film still from *Somewhere to Live* (dir. Jacques Brunius, ECA, 1951).

*Somewhere to Live* foreshadows the construction practices that came to be implemented in Europe in the 1950s. Although apparently novel, they relied on standardization methods and industrial building models that stem from prewar modernity. “Air, light and sun” was the credo of the pioneers of modern socialist housing in central Europe in the early twentieth century. Their aim was to free the people from the closed, dark environs of factories, schools, and tenement buildings—hallmarks of the disciplinary society—and to improve their health and living conditions through modern architecture. The men behind the ERP took up the cue and, one could argue, brought the project to full completion. Unlike their predecessors, the planners and architects tasked with implementing MP programs were given the financial, political, and spatial elbowroom to implement their visions on a grand scale.

Their Grand Design, however, was underpinned by liberal, not socialist ideals. It found its physical expression in the aesthetic of US postwar architecture framed under the term “International Style” modernism. The term is highly problematic as it was coined and strategically employed by the architect Philip Johnson and the historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock in an exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1932 to promote the European modernist style and certain architects in the US (Hewitt

2018). It became programmatic for the US State Department's activities in Western Europe after the war, referring back to influences by the German Bauhaus movement and the French L'Esprit nouveau (Castillo 2001). Many former Bauhaus members, fleeing from Nazi persecution, not only found refuge in the US, but also favorable working conditions and interest in their architectural visions (Jordy 1969; Sevilla-Buitrago 2017). Through the MP, their ideas were reimported to Europe after WWII. The buildings erected in postwar Europe with the help of Marshall aid were physical evidence of the MP's promise to rescue the Europeans from destitution. They also expressed the ideals of liberal democracy. The architectural style with its clean rectangular forms and large window fronts suggested lightness and sobriety, an effect that was underlined by the cost-effective and time-saving use of prefabricated parts.

In the interwar period, the efforts of the Bauhaus school to enter profitable collaboration deals with the industry met with limited success. By the end of the 1920s its financial situation had become precarious. When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, leading figures of the Bauhaus school were either forced to flee or chose to emigrate to the US. Here, the projects of the European avant-garde Bauhaus designers came to fruition thanks to the needs of the US industry and military during the Second World War.

Many of the Bauhaus faculty members and students were left-wing radicals and foreigners. But, as the architecture historian Joan Ockman points out, the designs of the former Bauhaus avant-garde Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe quickly lost their political ambition by aligning with corporate forces in US exile (Ockman 1997). Initial efforts to "democratize society" by introducing values of structure and transparency into the design of buildings met fertile ground in the US. Here, their originally radical ideas to create affordable housing, to design hygiene, and to reform ways of living could finally become what the protagonists had dreamed of during their Bauhaus time: mass products. William Jordy, commenting on the Bauhaus aftermath in the programmatic work of Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, argues that "both emphasized structure and technology which was normative and standard rather than radical and extraordinary. [...] Both programs accepted what is laconically given in modern American society and made this the starting point for their programs" (Jordy 1969, 515). In a mix of opportunism and industrial ambition, the architects used the leitmotif of "light, air, and sun" to realign modernist architecture with the imperatives of US capitalism.

These developments were accelerated by America's entry into the war. Walter Gropius, who by then was professor at Harvard University, and Martin Wagner, the former chief planner of Berlin, sought to convince the US authorities of the advantages of prefabrication. However, it was the war industry that quickly realized the advantages of standardizations and mobile architectures. Demountable airplane hangars, transportable dwelling units, and modular lightweight structures became of increasing importance when military forces had to operate outside their home territory (Cohen 2011). An example of this endeavor is the “Packaged House” that Walter Gropius had developed together with the modular construction pioneer Konrad Wachsmann in the early 1940s (Imperiale 2012). During his imprisonment in Vichy (France), Wachsmann had developed a universal system of industrialized building components, stemming from his work on demountable airplane hangars. Eventually, this steel tube-based prefabrication system was applied in a design for the Atlas Aircraft Product Corporation in 1944.

Wachsmann's collaboration with Gropius showed that the military system could also be used for civilian purposes. The Packaged House was a forerunner in industrialized building. Combining mobility and prefabrication, the two architects according to Cohen (2011, 226) aimed to

create a new kind of inexpensive, high-quality housing, with the latest equipment, consisting of standardized and interchangeable parts, to be used in different types of houses of different size. These lodgings would need to be demountable and transportable, but would also need to serve as permanent homes, depending on the circumstances.

Both architects lobbied for investments in an experimental house constructed on the grounds of the US Plywood Corporation in Somerville, Massachusetts, a city near Boston, in February 1943 and piqued the interest of the New York investor Jack Marqusee.

Although the Plywood Corporation never put the Packaged House into mass production, the system Gropius and Wachsmann had developed inspired numerous other prefabricated housing projects after the war. These were launched by military suppliers such as Vultee, Alcoa, and Reynolds Aluminium, who sought to redirect wartime production capacities into the postwar building industry. As architecture historian Beatriz Colomina notes, “modern architecture borrowed—or perhaps ‘recycled’ is a more accurate word—the techniques, materials, and ways of doing that were developed for the military” (Colomina 2007, 12).



The success of the mass production of former avant-garde architecture was not limited to the US. It was the ERP-sponsored study tours in cooperation with professional architecture networks that turned these designs into what Ockman (1997) called a “normative architecture” for the global West. Before the MP housing reconstruction program was launched, many European architects had participated in research trips to the US where they met their exiled colleagues and studied the US building sector. These trips were organized by the ECA, forming part of the ERP’s Technical Assistance Program to stimulate economic exchange with the US (Boel 1997; Castillo 2004; Kleinschmidt 2008). Aimed at European technicians, engineers, scientists, and economists, the program was meant to encourage the transfer of scientific and industrial knowledge to Europe. Architects and urban planners from Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands traveled to the US to study modern building techniques and (re)imported them into their home countries. Back in Europe the newly acquired knowledge informed the standardization and planning policies developed by organizations such as the Bouwcentrum Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

The German architect Egon Eiermann, who had participated in a study tour along the US East Coast during which he also visited Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, was deeply impressed by the industrialized building methods. In a presentation to his students in Karlsruhe in June 1950, Eiermann enthused about an industrial performance outside of European imagination. Using the construction of a single house as an example, he demonstrated the recent developments in the US building industry. Eiermann explained how US planning practice entirely depended on *Sweet’s Indexed Catalogue of Building Construction*, a publication intended to be a summary filing of manufacturer’s catalogues. Instead of designing individual solutions, the US building industry relied to a high degree on prefabrication and on mobile cement mixers. This highly standardized building method reduced the construction time of a single-family home to six weeks. Eiermann also pointed to the method’s negative implications for craftsmanship: “Everything is being done by labor unions and the construction industry to eliminate the craftsman.” Eiermann observed that large parts of the construction work could be executed by unskilled workers thanks to the use of prefabricated parts. This served the interest of the US industry which sought to increase their output and their profits. It also facilitated the transfer of workers from wartime industry to the construction sector which ultimately became a question of building standards and technology (Vossoughian 2017).

**ADAPTABILITY of General Panel's system to a wide range of plan problems is demonstrated by designs of well known architects.**

The designs on this page illustrate one of the most important characteristics of the General Panel line—what Wachsmann terms its "universality." Any architect or contractor who is willing to use a 3 ft. 4 in. module as the basis of measurement can readily build any sort of house he chooses from the system. In reality, this is no great limitation for it easily provides for such minimum dimensions as doors, passages, built-in storage, etc. Clear spans may be varied and—for an ingenious detailing of the roof framing—any desired slope may be had without modification of the panel. Nor is the system restricted to residential work; on the contrary, Wachsmann sets a wide application for it in nurseries, schools, hospitals—in fact, almost any single or two-story building type.

As presently manufactured by the California company, the system has, of course, certain limitations. Curves are impossible in it, so are wall intersections at any angle other than 90°. Heating must necessarily be by hot air (although General Panel engineers are already at work on a system of built-in radiant coils). Like any system fabricated of wood, the system is not 100 per cent fire- or insect-proof. However, in the real context of America's present housing shortage, these are rather far-fetched considerations. As of today, no manufacturer of industrial houses can lay a better claim to a "universal" system than General Panel's Konrad Wachsmann.

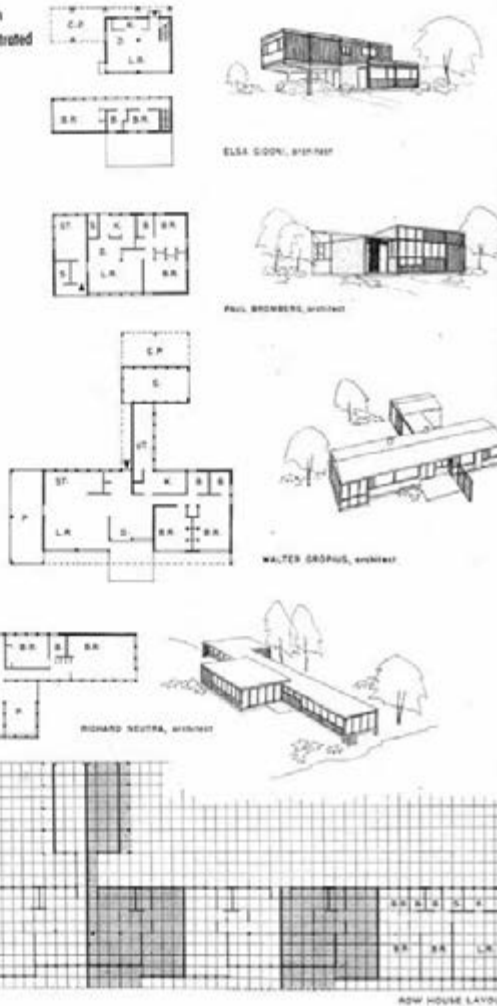


Figure 6.4. "Adaptability of the general panel's system to a wide range of plan problems is demonstrated by design of well-known architects." *Architectural Forum*, February 1947: 120.

If standardized building methods helped to reduce construction costs in the US, the same mechanisms could compensate for the shortage of skilled labor in postwar Europe. In any case, introducing these methods through the ERP had the double benefit of making housing more affordable and familiarizing the Europeans with a modern lifestyle. Fully equipped built-in kitchens, electrical household appliances, central heating, car parking lots—what prior to the war was a luxury for the few, suddenly became available for the many. At least this was the message the MP films promoted.

European policymakers, too, became attentive to the political potential of such technological advancements. When in late 1949 the MP policies shifted from reconstruction to modernization and improvement of living standards (Fritsche 2018, 30, 99), European governments saw the political potential of integrating the MP housing proposals into their own national agendas. They considered the provision of housing as essential to prevent people turning towards communist ideologies. In other words, providing housing was not only seen as a motor for prosperity, but also as a medium for ideology.

### Transforming Society

Former professional networks of architects were the mediating figures in implementing MP housing policies. In West Germany, the ECA launched a housing competition in 1951 with 725 entries by architects and contractors. Under the auspices of Hermann Wandersleb, then state secretary for housing in the West German Federal Ministry of the Interior, fifteen settlements were realized, each with 200 to 300 dwelling units at a total cost of DM 37.5 million. Two years later, another ECA housing project was implemented, this time to fill the housing needs of miners in the economically important industrial Ruhr district in northwestern Germany, with a total investment of DM 100 million. The people in charge of both programs were Bernhard Wagner, son of the US émigré Martin Wagner, and William K. Wittausch, former finance expert of the Federal Housing Administration in the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Wagner (1952, 130) lauded these MP initiatives, arguing that they fostered cooperation between architects, contractors, authorities, and landowners and freed them “from obsolete building regulations”.



Figure 6.5. ECA-Housing in Bremen. © Archiv Bremer Zentrum für Baukultur.

Retrospectively, these ERP-sponsored housing projects can be seen as a test bed for state authorities to experiment with new collaborations between planners and the industry. They paved the way for new national housing policies that used the promise of liberalism to achieve political goals. The West German Housing Act of 1956 illustrates the government's underlying political goals. According to State Secretary of Housing Hermann Wandersleb, the goal of the new housing law was to turn large parts of the West German population into property owners by sponsoring the building of family homes. The aim was not just to solve the severe housing shortage, but to change the structure of society through homeownership. By increasing the number of families who owned their home (and the property it was built on), the government hoped to curb communist influence, since property owners would hardly sympathize with an ideology that called for their dispossession.

The West German Conservative-Liberal coalition under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer explicitly prioritized the building of family homes (but not homes in general). Family homes were presented as a means to immunize West Germans against "Eastern ideologies" and to counter "*Ver-massungstendenzen*" (Wandersleb 1959, 14). The term, literally translated as the "tendency to become a mass", expressed a fear of modernization in the shape of mass culture, mass consumption, and egalitarian ideologies. Adenauer's family home policy illustrates that the German conservatives perceived both capitalism and communism as a threat to European culture and traditional social order.

How did these the ERP-sponsored building projects help to transform European postwar societies? How can we interpret this transformation? Gilles Deleuze's thoughts on the organization of societies are useful to reflect on the transformation of Western Europe after the Second World War. The MP did not trigger this development, but certainly helped to accelerate it. For Deleuze (1995, 178), the war constituted a watershed. It heralded the end of what Michel Foucault (1995 [1975]) had conceptualized as "disciplinary society" and the beginning of what Deleuze termed the "society of control". The disciplinary society, as sketched by Foucault, relies on institutional, "closed" architectures to shape individuals. Each institution enforces its norms on individuals, a process that is never completed, as Deleuze (1995, 177) underlines:

Individuals are always going from one closed site to another, each with its own laws: first of all the family, then school ("you're not at home, you know"), then the barracks ("you're not at school, you know"), then

the factory, hospital from time to time, maybe prison, the model site of confinement.

Deleuze argues that a disciplinary society forces people to constantly adapt their behavior to the physical and normative surroundings they are being processed through. Discipline prohibits the free association of people by dividing space architecturally according to hierarchies and functions, for which Bentham's Panopticon has been frequently cited as prime example (Foucault 1995 [1975], 195–228).

Control societies, in contrast, work in a much more dynamic and modulating manner. This form of control works in Deleuze's view (1995, 178–79) like "a modulation, like a self-transmuting molding continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another." In a society of control, governance "manages" life and the people through a system of challenges and incentives that invites competition and emulation. Control no longer takes a physical form, as in a disciplinary society, but is internalized by individuals. This sophisticated mode of control is, as first Foucault (1995 [1975]) and subsequently Deleuze (1995, 179, 182) argued, the most effective control because it is not recognized as such but exercised through self-regulation that promises personal freedom. Modules are characterized by their adaptability to individual needs, and thus suggest a freedom of infinite choices. Postwar liberalism is consequently interested in providing individuals with the sensation that they can shape their environments, instead of prescribing how they should live.

It is worth noting that the architectural discourse on modularity had already shifted when Deleuze published his "Postscript on Control Societies" in 1990 (translated into English in 1995). While during the early postwar era, architectural standardization aimed to optimize design for modern societies by prioritizing universal norms, these concepts of objectivity and universalism attracted growing criticism from the late 1960s. Some critics proposed to develop digital techniques, arguing that societal demands could be better met by "pattern recognition" and "shape grammars". The proponents of pattern recognition envisaged a collaborative design process between early computers and architects. Cedric Price notably experimented with modular building systems informed by user interaction (Frazer 1995). Shape grammars was a concept developed to solve rule-based design problems, similar to how grammar rules are applied to words and sentences in language. These rules define the transformations and operations that can be applied to shapes and thus allow to generate new shapes based on a set

of predefined rules (Stiny and Gips 1971). Both concepts, however, had their own biases and normative limitations.

The standardized building techniques and housing types that were adopted in postwar Europe indicate the transition from a disciplinary to a control society, in which the former has not yet lost all its power. The neat rows of efficiently constructed family homes we see in the MP film *Somewhere to Live*, adapted to fit in with local traditions, reflect the policymakers’ fear of the unpredictable and uncontrollable mass that must be disciplined. By rewarding the workers with their own family homes, the mass is divided into physical controllable units. Discipline is further exerted through the physical separation which allocates women to the home, while men are engaged in salaried jobs in offices or factories. Through a range of measures, such as family law, salary agreements, media representations and educational measures, women are assigned responsibility for the family and the domestic realm. Masculine identity rests on the man’s role to secure a living (and a home) for his family (Schissler 2001, 365–66). The family home thus functions as a means of disciplinary control, both through the physical enclosure and through the social values it represents and enforces on its occupants.

Yet in the building initiatives that the European governments launched across the continent with support of the ERP one can also detect signs of what Deleuze (1995) described as a more modular form of control. The MP films present these housing projects as liberation—a liberation from poverty, unhygienic living conditions, and cramped spaces. The film *Matera* (Life and death of a cave city, dir. Romolo Marcellini, Italy 1950), for instance, frames the building of modern housing for the “cave dwellers” in Matera in Southern Italy as a modernization and civilization process. The new homes, the film promises, will lift the people from poverty and darkness and thereby alter their lives fundamentally (Bonifazio 2014, 105–14; Tenzon 2018).

The housing projects promise not just freedom from want, but freedom from state interference in family lives. These homes were more than just comfortable spaces to live in. They fulfill the MP promise of individual freedom and prosperity for everyone while shielding the families from the type of disciplinary control exerted by the Nazi regime or current communist regimes. In 1958, the minister of family affairs in the FRG, Franz Josef Würmeling, insisted that the state or society had no right to dictate whether a woman should work. It did, however, “have the responsibility to make as easy as possible the decision of a woman and a mother against activity that is alien to the family”. The quote illustrates how political decision-makers sought to use the guise of choice to curb the personal freedom they promised their

citizens. Liberalism, too, requires control, although the liberal form of control is more covert than in disciplinary societies and has, as Deleuze argued, no need for physical barriers. Accordingly, the MP films and building projects promoted architectural designs that appear light and airy. The prefabricated modules can easily be adapted to individual needs and grant space to the individual. Yet these designs also compartmentalize life, dividing it into separate modules of work, leisure, transport, or self-care. Each aspect of life demands the individual's full attention, promoting self-control and fueling desire for more efficiency and perfection.

### Ideological Configurations of Public Space

*Somewhere to Live* delivers on the liberal promise to create better standards of living for every European. It presents liberal capitalism as the source of the economic power and skills needed to provide European families with homes and the comfort, privacy, and freedom that these homes symbolize. The US liberal capitalists were, however, not the only ones who were offering a solution to the severe economic problems Europe was facing.

Communism, too, promised a prosperous and peaceful future to the Europeans. Consequently, US policymakers found themselves in constant and, as the Cold War escalated, increasingly harsh competition with communism. In order to demonstrate the superiority of liberalism, the MP film campaign explained how prosperity, freedom, and peace was dependent on international trade. It highlighted the need for free movement of people and goods across national borders, unhindered by physical barriers, controls, or fiscal levies (Bruch, Clemens, Goergen, and Tode 2016; Fritsche 2016). Free movement generates economic growth and prevents war, as people who trade with each other have no interest in attacking their partner.

While communist ideology described freedom in terms of human equality, liberalism emphasized individual freedom. By introducing the audience to new modular dwelling concepts and housing policies, the MP films sought to inscribe the promise of freedom into the built environment. Yet since the architectural style the MP promoted was not radically different from modern communist architecture, liberalism had to be inscribed through additional means. The simplest way to promote liberalism was to present the communist East in an unflattering light and to contrast it with a modern, "free" West, thereby encouraging the audiences to draw their own conclusions. This strategy, however, carried some risks, because the European audiences had grown weary of propaganda and reacted negatively to anything that

smacked of it (Fritsche 2018, 201). The information officers in charge of MP film propaganda therefore advocated against openly addressing communism to underline the factuality of their information films. The majority of MP films never breached the subject of communism, although it was often the elephant in the room. It was only in the late phase of the MP, as the Cold War tensions reached new heights, that occasional references to communism entered the MP films (Fritsche 2018, 85).

These films are interesting not so much from a propaganda perspective, but because they illuminate how the films reconfigured space and inscribed it with new, liberal norms. For most Europeans who had lived for years under conditions of war and dictatorship, liberalism and democracy were abstract concepts that had little relevance to their everyday life. The MP films thus had to explain what liberalism was and present it as key to a better future. The strategy the British documentary filmmaker Peter Baylis applied in the MP film *Whitsun Holiday* (dir. Peter Baylis, MSA, 1953) was to remind the audience of liberalism's European roots. Baylis produced the film directly for the Mutual Security Agency (MSA), which replaced ECA at the end of 1951, and at the height of the Cold War when the MP had officially already ended. The narrative the film conveys is that Communism is diametrically opposed to the deeply ingrained European tradition of liberalism. To explain to the audiences what liberalism is and how it looks like, the film defines "liberal" Western spaces and contrasts them with "illiberal" spaces in communist Eastern Europe. The subject of the film—people spending a Pentecost weekend in Western and in Eastern Europe—presents leisure activities (or the absence of leisure) as expressions of a different ideological mindset.

*Whitsun Holiday* opens by showing how people in Western Europe start in their holiday weekend. The imagery creates the impression of vibrant activity as buses, cars, and bicycles carry their passengers in different directions. It shows people in different settings and different constellations, chatting, eating, drinking, doing sports, playing games, debating—or taking a nap. Western "liberal" space, so the argument goes, is open and wide and offers room for individualism and free association. Liberalism guarantees choice, as it allows people to relax in the open nature under trees or by a lakeside, and then transports them back to urban areas.

In contrast to the vibrant "liberal" Western spaces, the "communist" spaces appear closed and suffocating. Scenes set in East Berlin indicate that the public holiday cannot be used for individual relaxation. Party rallies, marching people and applauding masses fill the available space, leaving no room to move or to let the gaze wander. The view onto the sky is obstructed by the huge crowds and the many flags the people wave. Unlike their Western



counterparts, the people in the East are presented as an undifferentiated mass, clad in uniform clothing, apparently steered into one direction by party discipline. However, it is the acrimonious voice-over which gives the images a decisively negative slant as it claims that the scenes express the people's blind trust in the party. The visual and aural critique of the disciplinary control in the communist East presents the communist system as antiquated. The modern liberal regimes of the West, the film suggests, have no need to force people into a certain direction. Life in the West is presented as a well-managed chaos in which people pursue different social activities, thereby evoking associations of harmony and vitality. When the day closes in the West, people return to a cozily lit home, exhausted but happy. People in the East, the film suggests, continue marching into the night. They seemingly have no home to return to and no place to rest from the ideological furor they are exposed to.

*Whitsun Holiday* made for rather blunt political propaganda, which might explain why the film never entered regular distribution but was only shown in noncommunist union circles. The ECA information officers who organized the propaganda campaign prided themselves in a laissez-faire approach and gave the European filmmakers considerable freedom. However, they obviously feared that the film's disparaging depiction of the communist East might disgruntle the audiences and perhaps even create sympathy (Fritsche 2018, 85). Perhaps they were also concerned that the audiences might laugh at the depictions of the West, where people enjoy leisure time freed from any economic worries, which was for many as far removed from their reality as the depictions of the East.

The representation of the Communist East as a dreary, grey space without sunlight was not exclusive to *Whitsun Holiday*, but a recurrent theme both in fictional and informational films. The MP film *Air of Freedom* (Berliner Luft, FRG, 1951), coproduced by the West German ECA branch and the US High Commissioner of Germany, uses the same trope to demonstrate liberalism's superiority. The film presents West Berlin as a dynamic modern urban island in a drab Soviet-controlled territory to exemplify the differences between the "free" world and the Communist world. Subject of the documentary is the opening of the first German industry fair in West Berlin after the war (Castillo 2010, 26–28; Nolan 2012, 253–56). The fair symbolizes West Germany's economic recovery thanks to Marshall aid, while illustrating the Western world's (economic) strength through modern architecture and consumer goods. *Air of Freedom* associates the "free" world with vitality and transparency. Popular tunes, such as "Berliner Luft" ("Berlin air") and "Yankee Doodle Dandy", which accompany scenes of bustling activity in

West Berlin, illustrate the vibrancy of the West. These scenes contrast with the somber atmosphere in East Berlin that a symphonic tune in a minor key evokes.

While the scars of the war are still visible in both East and West Berlin, they are framed differently. East Berlin is presented in a state of stasis, with representatives of the state engaging in unproductive activity. One shot shows a couple of men doing gymnastics behind a high wall, a scene that is located in East Berlin by the commentary who scoffs that these were doing their "communist flip-flops" instead of rebuilding their city. West Berlin, in contrast, is seemingly busy clearing away the last remnants of war, making way for modernity. The industrial fair is emblem of this modernity. The glass fronts of the newly erected buildings encourage the visitors to glimpse at the wonders of the "free" world. The camera takes the spectators inside the vast and bright indoor spaces to marvel at the delicacies, fashions, and wonders of technology displayed.

The images of West Berlin working men who are putting the finishing touches on the fairground underline the difference with the apparent unproductive communist East. They also show that the ERP led to the creation of new jobs—a key promise of the MP. As shown above, the introduction of standardized building methods made lengthy training superfluous, thus opening up jobs for unskilled workers (Castillo 2010, 26). Building performed an integrative function in that it leveled out social differences and thus precluded class conflict. Both *Air of Freedom* and *Somewhere to Live* are visual testimonies to this integrative aspect of construction. In *Air of Freedom*, men work assiduously side by side, digging, drilling, hammering, screwing in unison, no questions asked about which side they stood on under the Nazi regime. In *Somewhere to Live*, architects and engineers from different European countries come together to find solutions to Europe's severe housing problem. Finland sends prefabricated wooden houses to Greece, Sweden does the same for France, gestures that, as the commentary in *Somewhere to Live* insists, attest to "the solidarity of the nations".

What distinguishes modern Western architecture from modern socialist architecture is not so much the style (Castillo 2010, 4, 7; Platzer 2019), but the meaning assigned to the architectural space. Both present architecture as emblems of modernity and freedom, but the terms have different connotations. Kimberley Zarecor (2010) has drawn attention to the continuities between interwar modernism and postwar socialist realism in Eastern Europe where architects and engineers continued earlier research on prefabricated construction technologies. They were also actively involved in cultural exchanges across the Iron Curtain through magazines and

exhibitions (Galjer 2020). However, most of the proponents of socialist realism rejected the ideas of Bauhaus and international modernism as cosmopolitan and claimed that they alienated people from their native culture (Nolan 2012, 247–48). Liberalism defines freedom in individualistic terms. The modern architecture featured in *Air of Freedom* is clearly informed by Bauhaus ideals and the socialist housing movement's slogan of "light, air and sun". Yet while the emphasis on light continues to symbolize health and hygiene, it now also signifies prosperity and security. The voice-over in *Air of Freedom* interprets the illuminated advertising signs as evidence that West Berlin is again "the great and glittering city it had been in the old days". Yet unlike in the politically and economically shaky 1920s and 1930s, life in West Berlin seems secure. Potential anxieties about the political division of Berlin are quelled by the commentary's assurance that the "free" world holds its protecting hand over the Berliners.

## Conclusion

It is probably not accidental that Gilles Deleuze used Rossellini's neorealist film *Europa '51* (dir. Roberto Rossellini, IT, 1952) to illustrate his argument that disciplinary society had come to an end in Europe (Deleuze 1990, 177). The story of the middle-class heroine (Ingrid Bergman), who is shocked about the prison-like conditions of the factory workers and is later locked into a mental institution because of her empathy for the poor, highlights the appalling socioeconomic differences in Italian society. It also presents disciplinary power as outdated, as it cannot contain the forces that disrupt society. For Deleuze, *Europa '51* marked a turning point in that it made clear that a new form of governance was needed to secure social peace, but that the new form inevitably came with new mechanisms of control.

The MP presented liberalism as solution to Europe's problems. By transforming Europe's fiscal and economic structure, Europe would prosper and be capable of defending itself against internal and external totalitarian threats. Convincing the Europeans of the advantages of liberalism was challenging, yet key to successfully implement the necessary reforms. The propagandists considered film as particularly effective medium to win the support of the Europeans as it demonstrated step-by-step how individual efforts could achieve a collective goal. Whether through self-built housing or unskilled labor on construction sites, finding "somewhere to live" no longer seemed an abstract or impossible task, but a concrete problem to which MP films and MP architecture provided practical answers. Thanks

to prefabricated elements, everyone could participate in the rebuilding of Europe and thereby achieve prosperity and happiness.

The liberal lifestyles the MP films promoted were closely interwoven with the industrialized building practices that the ERP (re-)imported to Europe. The filmmakers sought to win popular acceptance of standardized architecture by strategically using the associative power inherent in the medium of film. The films ascribed new meanings to the concepts of standardization, rationalization, and industrialized building, associating them with individual adaptability rather than repetitive monotony and the loss of tradition. *Air of Freedom* sparks the interest of the consumer by establishing a visual link between new building methods and the modern kitchen designs exhibited at the industry fair. *Somewhere to Live* argues that affordable standardized housing is compatible with traditional craftsmanship and national architectural styles. The MP films offer a taste of how MP architectural projects will be realized in the years to come.

What made these films so persuasive is that they were able to show how modern architecture answered the needs and desires of the audiences, thus turning abstract visions into concrete evidence. From the early 1950s onwards, the US government built a number of cultural information centers and libraries in West Germany and Austria, titled Amerikahäuser (America Houses). They represented US modernism. Yet both these Amerikahäuser and the ERP-sponsored housing programs had only limited reach in terms of visibility and reception. The MP films were therefore a crucial means to convey information about these projects even to the most remote corners of Europe. By promoting the advantages of liberal capitalism in terms of a more comfortable lifestyle, the MP films created desires for a single-family home or a modern kitchen, which the ERP building programs promised to answer. Postwar European governments then used these desires to prevent their countries from turning to communist ideologies. In the Marshall Plan, films and architecture became mutually constitutive elements that helped to transform postwar European society.

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## 7. Screening Dortmund in Ruins

### The Role of Elisabeth Wilms's Postwar Film Footage in City Politics and Local Remembrance Culture

*Alexander Stark*

#### Abstract

Combining the perspectives of amateur film research and useful cinema research, the chapter is a case study on film footage that was shot in the West German city of Dortmund in the immediate postwar period. The material stems from Dortmund resident Elisabeth Wilms, who at that time was an enthusiastic film hobbyist and was later able to turn that hobby into a profession. Her shots of the devastated city center of Dortmund can be regarded as the foundation of the filmmaker's decades-long career in utility film production, as her footage was used repeatedly in various contexts, from fundraising films, municipal promotional films, educational films, and remembrance films to TV documentaries—in most cases to evoke a sense of community.

**Keywords:** amateur film, useful cinema, promotional film, female filmmaker, Germany

This chapter focuses on film footage that was shot in the West German city of Dortmund in the immediate months and years after the Second World War. The footage has had a long career to this day, and it has undergone many functional transformations over the past decades. It stems from Dortmund resident Elisabeth Wilms, who at that time was an enthusiastic film hobbyist and was able to turn that hobby into a profession in the early 1950s. Her activity in utility film production lasted until her death in 1981 and resulted in over one hundred commissioned films. Her shots of the devastated city center of Dortmund and of the people living in its ruins can be regarded as the foundation of her decades-long career, as she became a



locally known personality and her footage was used repeatedly in various contexts, from fundraising films, municipal promotional films, educational films, and remembrance films to TV documentaries—in most cases to evoke a sense of community.

In this chapter as well as in my dissertation (Stark 2023), I am combining the perspectives of two branches of film studies, namely, amateur film research and *Gebrauchsfilmforschung* (useful cinema research). Both have explicitly chosen to turn away from the categories of artistic oeuvre, canon, and author in their programmatic work. Monographs and edited works such as those by Hediger and Vonderau (2009), Zimmermann (2011), Acland and Wasson (2011), and Tepperman (2015), among others have shown the productivity of this turn and have been able to shed light on the manifold practices and public or semi-public locations in which film played a vital role for companies, public institutions, associations, and communities, thus generating new insights into film practices outside of commercial cinema. My own work builds on this and is based on Elisabeth Wilms's filmic and written estate (containing about one hundred surviving films and over two thousand different paper documents), as well as additional archival research in various archives of companies, clerical organizations, and the city of Dortmund.

If I, for my part, combine the ideas of amateur and useful cinema research with an auteur approach by focusing on Elisabeth Wilms's case, this is done less for programmatic reasons in the sense of a return to old ways. Instead, I believe that in-depth studies of cases like hers can once again expand our understanding of nontheatrical film. Wilms's production company, for example, was by and large a one-person operation, strongly characterized by her person and personality as well as by her roots in the amateur film sector, and constantly operated in a low-budget niche of the utility film sector. This niche has so far been largely left out of research because those films were ultimately so unimportant for many of the clients that neither the films nor the accompanying production notes and documents on their exploitation have survived in the company archives to this day. Luckily, Wilms documented her business activities and the press coverage about her films (and herself) more sustainably than most of her clients did and these archival records have fortunately survived the decades after her death. Combined with the fact that she was active in film for several decades and worked for a wide range of clients, these sources, in the sense of Frank Kessler's concept of *historische Pragmatik* (historical pragmatics) (2002), allow for a detailed insight into the practices of film production and exploitation in this business niche. Unfortunately,

the source situation both in the amateur and the utility film sector is rarely like that. With regard to all these ideas, I am aiming at two things in this paper: to use this filmmaker's case as an example to illustrate the intersections of amateur and utility film production in the postwar and reconstruction periods in West Germany, and to trace her footage's changes in function and usage to point out the political role it played in the reconstruction period and still plays in the local and regional culture of remembrance (Schmid 2009).

## **The Ruhr Region and the War**

The Ruhr region formed Germany's industrial heartland for many decades and was shaped by many industrial cities with coal mines, steel mills, and engineering plants up until the second half of the twentieth century, when foreign competition led to a structural change in the whole region. The area's heavy industry was an important economic factor for Germany in peacetime, but it played an even bigger role in the two world wars, as it produced vital resources and products for modern warfare. While the Ruhr region itself was far away from the fronts during the First World War, the Second World War saw the further development and expansion of aerial warfare, which eventually made the region a target for the Allied bomber fleets. They sought to destroy industrial facilities in the region as best as they could. With the British Air Ministry's General Directive No. 5, also commonly known as the Area Bombing Directive, being issued in February 1942, the residential areas of the cities became an additional focus of attacks with the aim of demoralizing the German population (Harris and Cox 1995, 192).

The city of Dortmund repeatedly became a target of Allied bomber fleets. Between 1943 and 1945, they flew over a hundred air raids on the city, severely damaging the industrial facilities and destroying 95 percent of the buildings in the center. More than 6,000 people were killed during these attacks (Luntowski, Högl, Schilp, and Reimann 1994, 458). Only a quarter of the 161,000 homes in the city had remained intact. Despite these conceivably difficult circumstances, some 300,000 people (compared to 538,000 in 1939) were still living in the city at the end of the war, with the population increasing even further due to refugees from other parts of Germany (Petzina 1982, 308). On top of this, the destroyed infrastructure made the supply of the population with the most urgent necessities such as food, clothing, and heating fuel a major challenge for the American and later British occupation

forces. The drought summer of 1946 and the subsequent exceptionally cold winter further worsened the situation. During this difficult time for the city, national and international aid organizations such as Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (Relief Organization of the Protestant Church in Germany) were present in the city and, among other services, offered food for children or used clothing.

## Filming the Rubble

Not all parts of the city were affected by the air raids to the same extent. Suburbs such as the village of Asseln, where Elisabeth Wilms was living and working, were less impacted. She ran a bakery and grocery store there together with her husband. Their family business had been spared from the bombs and the childless couple was even able to take in relatives who had become homeless. While her husband was responsible for everything related to the bakery, she was the head of the grocery store. In 1941, amid World War II, she had discovered filmmaking as a hobby for herself, quickly became an enthusiast, and subsequently dedicated most of her free time to it. Elisabeth Wilms described her constant enthusiasm as “being like in a fever” (Wilms 1955, 36). The members of the local branch of the Bund Deutscher Film-Amateure (BDFA, Association of German Film Amateurs), the umbrella organization of German amateur filmmakers, played a major role in introducing her to filmmaking. Together with them she formed the local amateur film club after the war, the Schmalfilm-Klub Dortmund (Müller 1960), of which she was a lifelong member.

As amateur film equipment was hard to come by in wartime, Wilms began working with a borrowed 16 mm camera and presumably kept trading goods for scarce raw film stock. Even though at first this choice of format was obviously due to circumstances, it turned out to be a lucky decision, as 16 mm was *the* standard format for documentary filmmaking. From the beginning, she was interested in capturing her surroundings, such as the inhabitants of Asseln, the work in the bakery, and the idyllic scenery of her Westphalian home region. But she didn’t focus exclusively on this seemingly intact world. When Dortmund was bombed, she secretly filmed burning and collapsing houses in the city and the vapor trails of the planes high in the sky. At the end of the war, Wilms managed to hide the film camera, which had presumably come into her possession in the meantime, from the arriving US troops. Moreover, she kept on filming, as her job took her regularly across the city to the Dortmund canal port,

where she purchased new goods and filmed the ruins of the city and life in the rubble on the way.<sup>1</sup>

There are very few known comparable cases of German amateur filmmakers who were active in the immediate months after the end of the war. One of them is Rudolf Langwieler from Freiburg. He, too, captured his hometown on film before and after the bombing and documented the reconstruction process until 1950. From his material he assembled the film *Freiburg 1940–50* (dir. Rudolf Langwieler, FRG, 1950). After its completion, it was shown in a cinema in Freiburg to raise funds for the reconstruction of the municipal theater (Wolf 2010). The exploitation of Lengwieler's footage, originally recorded for private purposes, for fundraising is an interesting parallel to the use of Wilms's footage, although there are significant differences in scope, as we will see. But cases like that of Wilms and Langwieler seem to be the exception. For many film amateurs living in Allied-occupied Germany, more essential worries and hardships may have been at the center of their daily lives than pursuing their hobby. Others feared the confiscation of their equipment if they filmed, since the Allied military government strictly regulated publicist activities (Otto 1960). Since 1942, there had also been a shortage of raw film material for the amateur sector due to the war (Zimmermann 1997, 15). At least for Wilms, a remedy for this last problem was found in the immediate vicinity. One of her neighbors maintained contact with an acquaintance in the then Soviet occupation zone of Germany, who was able to provide materials for filmmaking. Where exactly it came from remains unclear, but Wilms herself stated that she received a lot of raw 16 mm film stock through this contact.<sup>2</sup>

### “Help Us Help!”

Another perspective on the postwar situation in Allied-occupied Germany is that of the Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland. This Protestant relief organization was founded in 1945 to help those Germans who were in need, such as homeless people, returning prisoners of war, and refugees from the former German eastern territories. In line with the concept of “helping people to help themselves,” the organization's core

1 See the film *Brot und Filme. Das große Hobby der Elisabeth Wilms* (Bread and films: Elisabeth Wilms's great hobby, dir. Jürgen Klauß and Michael Lentz, FGR, 1981, aired on December 5, 1981, on Westdeutscher Rundfunk: 0:20:45).

2 Ibid.

business consisted of purchasing raw materials abroad and having them processed in Germany into everyday goods to relieve the local labor market. The end products were partly distributed free of charge and partly sold. The financial profits in turn made it possible to carry out other programs, such as model settlement and housing construction projects for refugees and the construction of a series of forty-nine emergency churches. In addition, Hilfswerk was involved in the distribution of food donations from abroad, for example, under the CARE (Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe) and CRALOG (Council of Relief Agencies Licensed to Operate in Germany) programs. The organization's private-sector methods met with skepticism within the Protestant Church of Germany in particular, while others—for example, the American aid associations cooperating with Hilfswerk—saw no problem in this pragmatic approach. Due to this skepticism, but also due to the high costs incurred by the ongoing work, the organization was dependent on successful international public relations and regarded fundraising films as one useful tool in that context (Wischnath 1998).

Using films as a fundraising tool was neither new in Germany nor in the Protestant Church at that time. In the 1920s, various decentralized institutions dedicated to church film work were founded at the level of the regional churches in Germany. (Schmitt 1978). However, as this common practice became widely used by National Socialist organizations between 1933 and 1945 (Zimmermann 2005), this type of utility film was seen as politically biased after the war. The Hilfswerk officials must have known that, and so they went looking for a filmmaker who was both politically unencumbered and would even produce not just one, but two such films free of charge. They finally found this person in 1947 in Elisabeth Wilms. Wilms for her part could already draw on a pile of footage of the destroyed Dortmund and, as a devout Christian, was happy to be able to give something back, although she had previously only produced films for private use. Completed in November 1947 and March 1948, the two 16 mm films were shot in black-and-white, silent, set with intertitles, and around twenty minutes long. They were named *Dortmund November 1947* (dir. Elisabeth Wilms, Allied-occupied Germany, 1947) and *Schaffende in Not* (Working people in need, dir. Elisabeth Wilms, Allied-occupied Germany, 1948).

The films focus on the needs of Dortmund's population and share many similarities due to the subject matter, the same director and the production period directly following each other. Mainly based on the narration of individual cases, they offer points of identification for almost everyone, as they portray children, parents, the elderly, the sick and invalids, widows, and war returnees. Within this narration, the intertwining of public and

private spaces in the city plays a major role. Both films start with establishing shots of the destroyed Dortmund city center, which has hardly any distinctive points of identification left, and in which people seem to be primarily passing by or are trying to reduce the mountains of debris with shovels and other tools—an undertaking that seems endless in view of the enormous destruction. The public space does not seem to be where people like to spend time, especially since there seem to be almost no gathering places amid the rubble. The few that exist are overcrowded, for example, the streetcars, the railroad, or the grocery stores. The reason for this is a widespread state of shortage: a shortage of food, a shortage of clothing, a shortage of public transportation, a shortage of heating fuel. The absence of public spaces where people can stay and gather also suggests the absence of any state or urban regulatory power in the films. The role of the military government in the everyday life of the city's inhabitants remains nebulous and is hardly addressed at all. This foregrounds the role of *Hilfswerk* and other aid organizations, which corresponds to the purpose of the films. The question of who is to blame for the destruction and suffering, which could be traced back to National Socialism, is also completely left out.

Although the two films for the most part focus on private spaces and their inhabitants, in many cases these private spaces are not secluded. Moreover, the private appears as public not only through being filmed by Wilms, but also through the destruction of war and the fact that many private spaces are indeed shared spaces: Workers of an industrial company, who have resumed work, live in share barracks. A former air-raid shelter serves as shared accommodation for people who have become homeless and who sleep there tightly packed together. Cracked open by the bombs, stairwells and apartments are exposed to the public—where there were once stairs, people climb ladders to reach their apartments. The apartment of one family is missing an exterior wall, making their private life visible to passers-by. In another apartment, a little girl sits on the toilet. Part of the walls and roof around it are missing, so that she is holding an umbrella up to protect herself from the weather or/and gazes. This display of the private as a public space is an important part of the effect of both films, which I mentioned before. This is partly due to Wilms being very close to her protagonists with her camera, and partly due to the bomb damage, which has distorted and sometimes even inverted public and private spaces.

Although the production of the two films itself had proceeded quickly, their duplication was prolonged, which turned out to be fatal. There were two reasons for this: First, two branches of the relief organization were arguing with each other over who should pay for the resulting costs, and second,

many film laboratories in Germany were not available because they were either damaged, busy with their work for the Allies, or lacking the chemicals. Wilms in turn did not want to give the films to foreign laboratories because she feared that they could be confiscated, misplaced, or ruined. When the copying process finally started in the second half of 1948, the films came too late. The currency reform in June 1948 improved living conditions in the British, US, and French occupation zones. The films were intended for international circulation by Hilfswerk, but now the organization shied away from doing so, because it did not want to spread an out-of-date image of Germany. Ultimately, it was about Hilfswerk's international reputation. Instead of large-scale international distribution, only a handful of copies reached foreign countries and only because a frustrated Elisabeth Wilms gave them to representatives of foreign aid organizations working in Dortmund as a present for their work. In the end, the films were only screened in Westphalia, the territory which surrounds the Ruhr district, for the purpose of fundraising. There are few written records of these screenings, which suggest that the campaign was not very successful (Stark 2023, 183–87).

### **Actuality Becomes Remembrance**

That could have been the end of the two films. But in 1949 both the city of Dortmund and the regional press began to take an interest in them. Both played an important role in helping Wilms's fundraising films to start a second career: the city, by publicly labeling the films and their content as "objective reporting" and purchasing copies for the city archives (Westfälische Rundschau 1950); the press, by repeatedly reporting on the films and their creator. The story of the "filming baker's wife," as she was now nicknamed by journalists, fit well into the emerging reconstruction period. She was an ordinary woman who wanted to do something good for her fellow human beings amid the rubble (Stark 2023, 136–43). These two processes illustrate how a functional transformation of the two films took place as early as 1949, when many of the uncertainties of the postwar period in the British, US, and French occupation zones were resolved by the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG): actuality became remembrance. Wilms, in turn, was able to use this double attention to her advantage. The city commissioned a documentary film from her that was supposed to be a counterweight to the grim fundraising films and document the local reconstruction efforts. In the meantime, the city government had decided a partial deviation from the historical layout of the roads and

buildings. Except for very few buildings such as churches and the utility infrastructure, the historical and crowded cityscape of Dortmund from the prewar period was not restored. Instead, the extensive destruction was seen as an opportunity to reorganize the center into a more spacious, more generous form (Högl 1985, 207).

Wilms's film was given the title *Dortmund im Wiederaufbau* (Dortmund under reconstruction, dir. Elisabeth Wilms, FRG, 1950). It also served for the most part as an archival documentation (Stark 2023, 268–72). Wilms became the city's favored freelancer for film projects in the years and decades that followed, which included the film documentation of the construction of prestigious buildings, educational and promotional films for the municipal utility company, and later promotional films for the city's press office.

The commission of *Dortmund im Wiederaufbau* can be seen as a first step of Dortmund's municipal administration towards the cultivation of a city image with the help of film, which in the years and decades to come became an important part of self-portrayal for West German cities. This was also the case for many cities in the Ruhr region (Minner 2012). The fact that municipalities cooperated with amateur filmmakers in this, as seen in Dortmund, is not an exception according to my research. For many amateur filmmakers, the Second World War and its end brought biographical ruptures. Some were unable or unwilling to return to their former professions, businesses, or home regions and used the new circumstances to turn their hobby into a profession (Stark 2023, 285–89). This is illustrated by the example of Hans Rotterdam, a trained baker who was hired as a photographer in 1948 by the Gelsenkirchen Transport and Reconstruction Office, where he implemented the concept of filmed annual chronicles for the city. Starting in 1951, the city itself produced these 35 mm documentaries every year, which focused on the political, cultural, and social development of Gelsenkirchen and were shown to a local audience to cultivate the city's image and explain political decisions.<sup>3</sup> Other amateur filmmakers simply went into self-employment with their hobby, such as Herbert Karl Theis, who, after being a prisoner of war and initially beginning his studies, founded a one-man film production company which produced two 16 mm promotional films for the Ruhr cities of Marl and Castrop-Rauxel and the city of Wolfsburg during the 1950s (Springer and Minner 2012, 11–15).

For Wilms, her first commissioned film by the city of Dortmund in turn was an important step towards a utility film career—probably never intended by the hobbyist, but gratefully accepted. Early in this process

3 <https://www.heimatabend-ge.de/#heimatabend>.



though, Wilms began to weave her own legend, maybe to look successful and attract new customers. From the beginning of the 1950s, press interviews with her and reports on her work contain increasingly fantastic statements about the success of her debuts for Hilfswerk. In a letter written by herself and published in the amateur film magazine *Der Film-Kreis* (The film circle), she states that the films were shown all over the world in front of 30,000 people and allegedly even moved refugees emotionally so much that they donated their wedding rings (Wilms 1955, 37). This account, which was constantly reiterated and repeated in the following years and decades when journalists reported on Wilms and her films, stands in striking contrast to Hilfswerk's rich archival records.

Quite a few of the 200 newspaper articles from the regional, national, and international press that can be found in Wilms's estate talk about her productions for Hilfswerk. Within a few years, the "filming baker's wife" managed to establish an economic foothold in the field of utility film production by creating, among other things, industrial films for various clients from the Ruhr region. In my dissertation, I argue that she was able to cover a low-budget niche in this film sector. Part of that was her deliberate self-promotion as an amateur and supposed hobby filmmaker, which in turn distinguished her from her (male) colleagues like Theis who were career changers as well, but presented themselves as professionals.

We must assume that for potential clients, this amateur status was not necessarily associated with negative connotations, such as poor film quality, but rather with positive connotations, namely above all the expectation of lower production costs compared to "professional" production companies as well as a particular "hobbyist" enthusiasm towards the film project, which wasn't linked to profit making. In fact, Wilms's tax records show that she could have lived off her earnings as early as 1955 but was never dependent on them thanks to the family-run bakery. This in turn had an influence on her pricing policy (Stark 2023, 108–12). The press, for its part, played a major role in supporting Wilms's self-promotion by uncritically picking it up again and again.

## Remembrance and Local Politics

Up until the end of the 1960s, Wilms herself left her two works for Hilfswerk in their original form (silent and set with intertitles), before she had them set with a voice-over commentary (reading out the then cut-out intertitles) and classical music. Obviously, this was an attempt to adapt to changing

viewing habits. At the same time, screenings of *Dortmund November 1947* and *Schaffende in Not* can be traced to events at local private associations and a few interest groups, such as the Dortmund chapter of the Deutscher Hausfrauenbund ([West] German Housewives' Association) or the Association of Protestant Church Congregations in Dortmund.

Interestingly, these institutions, obviously based on traditional gender roles, provided different screening contexts for male and female audiences. The events for predominantly or male-only audiences such as the Lions Club of the neighboring town of Schwerte were concerned with acquiring and passing on historical knowledge and discussing existing problems. The screenings for female audiences such as the Deutscher Hausfrauenbund took place in the context of "coffee parties" or a "cozy get-together." Based on the archival documents, it can be said that they served to build community and always framed the films positively by references to the well-advanced reconstruction of the city center (Stark 2023, 337–43).

Between 1960 and 1980, Wilms also produced five promotional films about Dortmund on behalf of the city. Many of them also contained shots of the devastated city center and took them as a narrative starting point for the positive postwar development of the city. Compared to other West German cities, Dortmund started producing promotional films rather late, due to the fear that a municipal promotional film would quickly become outdated as the reconstruction was still ongoing and progressing (Stark 2023, 283–92). Since the reconstruction itself was an expensive undertaking, there were limited funds for promotional film production. Therefore, some of Dortmund's promotional films were low-budget productions that have been reworked again and again and to keep them up to date and useable, such as *Treffpunkt Dortmund—Erinnerungen, Skizzen, Notizen* (Meeting place Dortmund—Memories, sketches, notes, dir. Elisabeth Wilms, FRG, 1971–77). At the production level, the films are a joint effort by Wilms and city officials. The Press and Transportation Office and its successor offices were involved in the production, apparently providing text and sound, and determining which locations would appear in the film. The films were all made in 16 mm format and were intended for local nontheatrical exhibition.

Not all of these works have survived. Regarding the city's history, the surviving films share a common narration. Like I mentioned, they take Wilms's establishing shots of Dortmund's city center in ruins as their starting point: It is presented as a central, traumatic, and catastrophic moment in the city's history and as the basis for its positive development in the following years and decades. A mention of the causes of the destruction

(the war sparked by the Nazi regime) is found only in the late films and only very marginally. It does not fit into the image of the modern and forward-looking city that is cultivated here. As these films reused parts of the *Hilfswerk* films, the images of the quasi-nonexistent public spaces in the city right after the war became a recurring element in cultivating Dortmund's public image. In the context of city promotional films, they stand in stark contrast to what the film depicts as the present condition: In keeping with the long tradition of the city film (Goergen 2015a), public places play an important role in Dortmund's film self-portrayals, be they parks, gardens, swimming pools, transportation hubs, sports stadiums, theaters, or shopping facilities. They serve as evidence of the power of action and the successful work of the city government. As an important part of this narration, films such as *Treffpunkt Dortmund—Erinnerungen, Skizzen, Notizen* portray the reconstruction, or rather new construction process, as a joint effort of the inhabitants, wisely directed by the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD, Social Democratic Party of Germany), that turned a barely habitable space into a modern city. This recurring and unambiguous political framing of the films' effort to create a spirit of community is not surprising considering that the SPD has consistently provided the city's mayor since 1946 and given the correlation between the production years of Wilms's municipal promotional films and the years of the local elections (Stark 2023, 313–14). In addition, this kind of representation also fits well into the city's self-image, which had already been cultivated before the war. Historian Jochen Guckes, who studied a wide range of text materials from the years 1900 to 1960, identified the narration of a "quasi-permanent rise of the city" as one of central topoi in the city's self-image (Guckes 2011, 400–408).

Wilms's works for the city administration were promotional films about Dortmund for Dortmund's inhabitants. Accordingly, they were screened, frequently by the filmmaker herself, on behalf of the city in public or semi-public contexts in the city. For example, as a separate evening program item of various flower fairs, as part of an advertising campaign of the municipal theater in a department store, or in front of local clubs and associations, to which they were made available free of charge (Stark 2023, 312–13). Last but not least, it is also worth noting that these films did not stand on their own. They were part of a whole range of media products (which could span from city-specific matchbox motifs, posters, postcards, newspaper articles, or films to records with city-related songs) that were used in conjunction with each other, a *Medienverbund* (media network) (Elsaesser 2009), to shape the city's self-image.

## The Local Becomes National

In the context of this political appropriation of Dortmund's postwar history, two new productions were created from the material of the *Hilfswerk* films by Wilms. This happened again as commissioned work for the city, for the thirtieth anniversary of the end of the war, as well as for the upcoming local elections. The first of them, *Eine Stadt in Schutt und Asche* (A city in rubble and ashes, dir. Elisabeth Wilms, FRG, 1974) is about forty minutes long, was considered too long by the city and went into the archive, whereupon the reworked, twenty-minute-long version, named *Dortmund damals* (Dortmund back then, dir. Elisabeth Wilms, FRG, 1974) was made. This film became part of a combined show of film screening and slide presentation entitled "Dortmund 1945/1975," which was repeatedly presented in public in Dortmund. Within the first eight months alone, there were 150 shows in and around Dortmund. The format was repeated several times a week by the city, slightly modified, at least until mid-1977. As a result, *Dortmund damals*, which was circulated in at least five copies, was allegedly performed in front of 20,000 viewers (probably also in Dortmund schools) within three years and thus undoubtedly played a decisive role in shaping the local or regional culture of remembrance regarding the postwar period (Stark 2023, 347). Both films mark the beginning of a change in the interpretation of Wilms's postwar footage in the context of local remembrance culture. While the *Hilfswerk* films place a strong focus on the individual stories of the people portrayed, the two 1974 productions present them as exemplary evidence of living conditions in the postwar period. For example, there is no mention of personal names or biographical facts. A temporal distance from what is shown is clearly perceptible.

*Dortmund damals* was rated as "*besonders wertvoll*" ("particularly valuable") by the West German Film Evaluation Office in Wiesbaden, which legitimized it as an accurate film portrayal of the postwar period (Ruhr-Nachrichten 1977). Subsequently, the film received widespread attention beyond Dortmund in the following years and was repeatedly screened in various contexts.

However, it must be said that there is another 16 mm film that emerged from Wilms's rubble footage that has probably received the widest distribution of all. It was made in 1980, shortly before Wilms's death, as a joint project between her and the West German Institut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht (FWU, Institute for Film and Image in Science and Education). Wilms herself has her say in the film as a contemporary witness, and even though she locates the images in the course of her explanations

in Dortmund, it is clear from the film's layout and its title *Alltag nach dem Krieg* (Everyday life after the war, dir. Elisabeth Wilms, FWU, FRG, 1980) that the footage is presented as an example, being representative of the immediate postwar period in all of Allied-occupied Germany. The film was distributed nationwide to schools and other educational institutions through FWU, first via 471 16 mm copies, then via 251 VHS tapes. The FWU ended distribution in 2010 (Stark 2023, 354), but the LWL (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe) Media Center for Westphalia, a regional media archive which holds the film estate of Elisabeth Wilms, put together a DVD in 2011 with some works from her oeuvre, among them also *Alltag nach dem Krieg*. In 2021, the archive also made the film publicly available on YouTube.<sup>4</sup>

After the filmmaker's death in 1981, there was and still is a certain local demand for her material. To this day, those films that focus on the postwar period are repeatedly screened at local film festivals, retrospectives, or public remembrance events. But the largest context of use to date, which mainly took off in the mid-1980s, is television. One of the main users of Wilms's entire film estate, but especially her postwar footage, is the broadcaster Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), a public service station whose primary broadcast area was the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, but which can nowadays be received throughout the country. Particularly during the pilot project for cable television in Dortmund carried out by this station in the years 1984–88, Wilms's material, with its clear local reference, was used extensively to illustrate reports and the news and therefore once again contributed to the local culture of remembrance. WDR continues to regularly use Wilms's material up until today. A good overview of this and for the material's role within a local or regional culture of remembrance is the WDR documentary *Heimatabend Dortmund* (An evening for hometown Dortmund, dir. Christoph Schurian, Frank Bürgin, FRG, 2013), which recapitulates the recent history of the city. On a visual level, more than 50 percent of the shots used are by the "filming baker's wife." Like the promotional films for the city itself from the 1960s to the 1980s, this documentary begins by narrating the destruction in World War II as if this event had almost meant the end of the city.

Aside from WDR, other national and international television stations are also regularly using Wilms's estate. Between 1990 and 2019, a total of seventy television documentaries used material by the Dortmund filmmaker, with most of the demand being for her footage from the postwar period. Especially in these contexts, a questionable de-contextualization of the

4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ophFwfBeULs>.

footage can be observed. The shattered buildings and the people living in them no longer represent Dortmund, but rather other places in Germany or the country as such after the war (Stark 2023, 366–78).

### **Conclusion: Screening Dortmund in Ruins**

In 2002, the *Westfälische Rundschau* stated in reference to Elisabeth Wilms: “Everyone has probably seen her footage of the city destroyed in the war somewhere” (Westfälische Rundschau 2002). While this sentence from a regional newspaper may at first seem to be an empty phrase, this chapter has made it clear such a comment has a point, at least regarding the clearly defined local area of Dortmund as well as the surrounding region. Harald Schmid and others have pointed out the connection between culture of remembrance and regional history and consequently the existence of regionally specific cultures of remembrance (Schmid 2009). My analysis of the contexts of use of Wilms’s postwar footage has shown that such a locally specific culture of remembrance exists in Dortmund and that the destruction of the city center in World War II and its reconstruction or new construction form an important part of it. This local-specific expression has been shaped over the years by various stakeholders, not least the city government. Wilms’s film material from the immediate months and years after the war, in turn, can be regarded as a central component of this local culture of remembrance. Not only because there are no other moving images from the city from exactly this time, but also because Elisabeth Wilms, very likely also due to her status as a Dortmund resident and at the time as a film amateur, created very intimate insights into life in the ruins, which stand out from the reporting of official authorities at the time.

Her footage has gone through a multifaceted career that was shaped by the interaction of various stakeholders and their interests. First, the filmmaker, for whom the footage became a door opener and provider of publicity. Her case may be very specific, but as I have been able to show, she was not the only amateur who managed to turn her hobby into a profession in the aftermath of the war and thus to create intersections between the amateur film and useful cinema sectors. Second, the relief organization *Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*, which had a great influence on what was and was not thematized by commissioned films that had the main purpose of getting the audience to donate. This is an aspect that in turn affects the perception of the material today, as certain topics are simply not represented, and this condition is rarely questioned. Third, the

city government led by the SPD was concerned with arguments over urban planning decisions and community building during the reconstruction and later the period of structural change. Over the years, the leaders of the city government discovered that film could be a useful tool in this process and became an important client of Wilms. Fourth, and last, was the involvement of WDR and other television stations and production companies, which strive to illustrate every bit of narration in their documentaries and, for their part, like to tell stories that evoke both emotion and a sense of community, as can be seen from the example of *Heimatabend Dortmund*.

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## About the Author

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## 8. From Rubble to Ruins

War Destruction, Postwar Reconstruction, and Tamed Modernization<sup>1</sup>

*Francesco Pitassio, Johannes Praetorius-Rhein, and Perrine Val*

### Abstract

This chapter focuses on the role non-fiction cinema played in depicting the destruction caused by warfare and the effort of reconstruction. The basic assumption, which refers to the work of philosopher Michel de Certeau and social anthropologist Paul Connerton, is that urban space brings together two features: on the one hand, it is a built environment; on the other hand, its appropriation and experience create memory and identity. The postwar era set a major task for European nations: How to reconstruct urban environments and mend the social fabric? Focusing on examples from Italy, France, and Germany, this chapter discusses how non-fiction cinema contributed to promoting this endeavor and negotiated new urban spaces with reference to previous experience and traditions, in narrative and visual terms.

**Keywords:** urban space, urban planning, public housing, collective memory, place memory

### Framing and Reconstructing

European cities faced an unprecedented annihilation of their public spaces and private dwellings during the postwar period. Massive destruction affected major cities such as Warsaw, Rotterdam, Le Havre, Riga, Danzig,

<sup>1</sup> The authors discussed and shared the structure and content of the chapter. Francesco Pitassio wrote the sections “Framing and Reconstructing,” “Proceed with Caution: Presenting Italian New Townscapes,” and “Conclusions”; Perrine Val wrote “Envisioning a ‘Bright New Future’ in France”; and Johannes Praetorius-Rhein wrote “Taming the 1920s in Germany.”

Stalingrad (now Volgograd), and the majority of German urban areas, as well as minor centers, such as Cassino, Guernica, Oradour-sur-Glane, or Lidice. The range of devastation, as an effect of air bombing, long battles within the urban areas, or reprisals, was so extensive that the expression “urbicide,” meaning the intentional destruction of built environments as a way to crush social bonds (Coward 2009), seems to perfectly fit into what the survivors faced after 1945. The metaphor of the “zero hour” for the immediate postwar era implied the end of civilization and, therefore, of History as progress: “It was a description of negation, the emptying out of historical time. [...] It signalled the fall of value and civilisation itself, a kind of ground zero of European culture” (Betts 2020, 38–39). The condition of most European urban areas could be called a “space of exception,” by adapting the notion of “state of exception,” which Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben coined (Agamben 2005). The concept, whose juridical genealogy Agamben scrutinizes, describes a peculiar condition, at the threshold of the law, happening at times of social turmoil, revolution, or major transitions. A state of exception therefore corresponds to a precariousness or absence of usual forms of power and, in topological terms, to marginality: “Being-outside and yet belonging: this is the topological structure of the state of exception [...]. The state of exception is an anomic space in which what is at stake is a force of law without law” (Agamben 2005, 35, 39).

We claim that this marginality and uncertainty can be adapted through the notion of “space of exception,” with specific reference to the transition between war destruction and postwar reconstruction (Rifkin 2014; Schindel and Colombo 2014), when both sovereign power and spatial structures were unsteady or barely identified. The subsequent cultural and building endeavor aimed at bringing about a new state and space, steady, solid, and modern.

The reconstruction of private housing during the war’s aftermath intertwined various concerns. It dealt with a humanitarian crisis and a social and political emergency. Accordingly, it incarnated a postwar ideology of progress, which went hand-in-hand with an alleged consideration for individuals and communities. Finally, by reconfiguring urban planning and space, it affected collective memory. Rebuilding European cities and housing was a matter of civilization for postwar policies and administrations. Restoring what most European societies assumed to be their basic kernel, that is, families and their shelter, was a condition to reinstate the social fabric warfare tore apart and to re-establish history and memory after the “zero hour.” Recovery agencies, such as UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), or plans, such as the ERP (European Recovery Plan), better known as the Marshall Plan, placed at the core of

their endeavor the reconstruction and, together with it, the re-establishing of proper living conditions for the population (Ellwood 1992; Scrivano 2013).

We assume that urban space is a social construct, a network of relationships embodied in buildings and related functions, and experienced through generations and individual and collective bodies. Thus, we realize how intermingled postwar urban planning, public spaces, private housing, and memory are. Urban planning is first and foremost the realization of a built environment. According to the pioneering work of French historian and social scientist Michel de Certeau, the city is both a system, which he compares to language, and its appropriation/usage by individuals, which he associates with enunciation or an act of speech (De Certeau 1984). Therefore, the city is a plan and its individual and social experience. Urban destruction and reconstruction molded both the plan and the experience. The postwar era was the epoch of a major reshaping of European urban plans and, because of the association of popular housing with the welfare state, of huge initiatives for popular housing. Urban planners and historians highlight the relation between reconstruction and social concerns. This relation took different forms. On the one hand, reconstruction coincided with notions of progress. It implied projects for healing metropolitan environments (Dierendorff 1990) and implementing a shift in terms of civilization: this is well incarnated by the recurring metaphor of moving from a primitive to a modern condition, from caves to well-equipped and rational flats (Morgante 2019). On the other hand, reconstruction created brand-new neighborhoods, which accelerated the transformation of cities into abstract spaces. Social anthropologist Paul Connerton claims that there are two types of place memory, which he respectively calls “memorial” and “locus.” The former, epitomized by place names (for instance, Trafalgar Square in London, or Náměstí Jana Palacha in Prague, or Willy-Brandt-Platz in Frankfurt am Main) or pilgrimages, reactivates “intentionally” collective memories. The latter, exemplified by the house and the city street, defines memory through multilayered and multigenerational everyday experience.

There is, in other words, a certain matter-of-factness, a *taken for granted-ness*, which distinguishes our experience of a locus from our experience of a memorial. A memorial has something in common with a work of art, in the sense that we assume that a work of art, a painting or piece of sculpture, is a more or less demanding message, explicitly addressed to us, something that asks of us a focused interest, a degree of concentration, even absorption. [...]. But we experience a locus *inattentively*, in a state of distraction. If we are aware of thinking of it at all, we think of it not so

much as a set of objects which are available for us to look at or listen to, rather as something which is inconspicuously familiar to us. It is there for us to live in, to move about in, even while we in a sense ignore it. We just accept it as a fact of life, a regular aspect of how things are. This is the power of the locus. That is why the locus is more important than the memorial—whose construction is so often motivated by the conscious wish to commemorate or the unavowed fear of forgetting—as a carrier of place memory. (Connerton 2009, 34–35)

War destruction and the ensuing reconstruction did away with century-old urban areas and intensified the shift to a new urban milieu. This latter allegedly rationalized collective life and, in practice, produced a rupture between workplace and residence, thus severing ancient bonds and related memory. This transition can be discussed as the work of “cultural trauma,” a term coined by Neil Smelser and Jeffrey C. Alexander. Cultural trauma is the process of turning a social crisis into a cultural one, therefore enabling a collectivity to experience them. In fact, traumas are culturally perceived. As Alexander claims, “only if the patterned meanings of the collectivity are abruptly dislodged is traumatic status attributed to an event. It is the meaning that provide the sense of shock and fear, not the events in themselves.” Accordingly, cultural trauma “is the result of an exercise of human agency, of the successful imposition of a new system of cultural classification” (Alexander 2004, 10). Moreover, collective memory, and particularly between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is associated with nationhood. Jeffrey K. Olick moves from a constructivist perspective and argues that “there are no identities, national or otherwise, that are not constituted and challenged in time and with histories, but nations have had a special place in the history of memory and in the history of their relations. Memory and the nation have a peculiar synergy” (Olick 2003, 2). However, nations remember differently; they activate different cultural references, and mold their memories with different styles.

To sum up, European cities faced brutal destruction of their environments, which created spaces of exception, whose rule and identity were precarious. Mending the social fabric required providing new dwellings and designing new neighborhoods. This deep alteration affected the experience inhabitants had of the cities they lived in and collective memory. How did different European nations depict war destruction and ensuing reconstruction of private and related public spaces? How did they perform this work of cultural trauma to lead respective communities into a new era?

European urban areas had been centripetal and gated communities until the late nineteenth century. World War II and its aftermath eroded urban

boundaries and, therefore, urban identity, transforming its memory into something more fluid or short-termed. The shift to new notions of urban life and private and public spaces, however, required a *cultural negotiation*. Vision played a crucial part in this negotiation, by referring to the visual memory of townscapes and to local culture. Simon Ward, in discussing the postwar visual culture of Berlin, argues:

The term “spatial image” implies that the embeddedness of the objects in a spatial framework is central to its function as a site of resistance to the wiping clean of modern space. Local tradition calls attention to the site as having a connection to its collective past and frames it as a “spatial image” that is read against the (otherwise anonymous) abstracting forces of urban transformation. The “framing” is crucial, for it must not simply preserve the object, but also the mode of encounter. (Ward 2016, 16)

The heyday of urban planning and townscape design, in postwar Europe, therefore relied on visibility as a means to address communities and induce the shift from previous to new urban experience (Erten, Pendlebury, and Larkham 2015). Cinema played a non-negligible part in conveying these visions and deploying its “useful” role, to refer to the notion of “useful cinema” coined by Wasson and Acland (2011). Using this term, the two scholars do away with inherited distinctions between fiction and non-fiction cinema and describe a production which aims at performing an action on society, education, public affairs, industry, and so on. As the two scholars put it, useful cinema is “a body of films and technologies that perform tasks and serve as instruments in an ongoing struggle for aesthetic, social, and political capital” (Wasson and Acland 2011, 3).

Postwar cinema frequently performed a utilitarian function, to describe a state of exception and lead the transition to an unprecedented condition; to achieve such goal, it carried out a work of cultural trauma, which national collective memories inflected in their respective styles.

### **Proceed with Caution: Presenting Italian New Townscapes**

The corpus scrutinized here comprises two groups of sources. Firstly, the productions originated in the activities of the Centro di Documentazione (Documentation Center), depending on the prime minister’s cabinet. Created in 1951, this center offered media support for policies that the ruling administration undertook (Frabotta 2002; Presidenza del Consiglio dei

Ministri 2009). With regard to film productions, this endeavor often went in disguise. Productions were outsourced and viewed as private initiatives, but promoted the efforts of the administration (Bonifazio 2011 and 2014; Hemsing 1994). Furthermore, newsreels and particularly those from *Notiziario Nuova Luce* and *La settimana Incom*, were taken into account. These productions, and particularly the latter, even though were private initiatives, because of three bills approved between 1947 and 1949, were highly subject to the ruling administration (Quaglietti 1980). Thematically speaking, the scrutiny refers to the representation of war destruction and the subsequent reconstruction of private dwellings and related townscape. For this reason, the period chosen spans from 1945 to 1956. These years coincide with two major endeavors for reconstruction, those being the UNRRA action, between 1946 and 1949, and the first plan for public housing, the INA-Casa plan,<sup>2</sup> between 1949 and 1956. The former, under the aegis of the newly created United Nations, mostly addressed the emergency of displaced persons (for instance, exiles from historical Italian settlements in Dalmatia or Istria) or population evacuated after the destruction of their houses (Scrivano 2013). The UNRRA action also maintained an impressive amount of visual materials, including photographs and utility films, to promote its initiatives. The latter was and still is the major endeavor to provide the Italian population with popular housing, and it was a unique solution for hitting two birds with one stone. In fact, the INA-Casa plan, whose two parts cover fourteen years (1949–55 and 1956–63), offered huge masses of the unemployed an occupation in the construction industry and a house, which they could rent or buy at discounted rates (Di Biagi 2001 and 2003; Fanfani e la casa 2002; Pilat 2014). It therefore acted as a welfare state initiative and a way to bring about social peace in Italy.

Utility films are, very often, highly standardized and serialized (Hediger and Vonderau 2009). Their performance relies on repetition more than on aesthetic uniqueness. Postwar Italian useful films acted as informative agencies, by circulating breaking news and framing political actions; reinforced the sense of belonging, by disseminating the representations of multifarious regional landscapes, heritage, and identities; and instructed the population on the rituals and requirements of newborn democracy. As Paola Bonifazio posits, postwar useful films administered a pastoral power, leading Italian citizens into the new opportunities implied by democracy and modernity (Bonifazio 2014). To do so, they also championed the efforts that the ruling administration made in reconstructing the nation, heralding them through

2 The acronym INA refers to the company overseeing the financial side of the reconstruction plan, the Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni (National Insurance Company).

the trope of a new life. For instance, in supporting the National Loan for Reconstruction, La settimana Incom produced a fictional short in 1946. Two husbands wait for their newborn children in a hospital waiting room. This fictional sequence, describing the anxiety and joy of two fathers, is followed by a documentary sequence displaying newborn babies, toddlers, and children playing and moving in a school or orphanage, while a voice-over invites the viewer to subscribe to the national loan in order to secure a future for their children. Therefore, reconstruction in and of itself means embracing a new life.<sup>3</sup> But why is the trope of the new life so crucial? And how can past identities be kept if the past is wiped away?

As previously explained, Agamben argues that due to its juridical peculiarity, the state of exception is topologically liminal to the law, anomic but functional to the *nomos*. We would like to convert this notion into that of “space of exception,” since it matches the condition of many peripheral spaces depicted in postwar non-fiction cinema: marginal, but reinforcing the norm, through their misery; transitional, between the city and the countryside, but also between a primitive past and a shiny modernity; anomic, in that no authority seems to rule them, and therefore they require normalization and inclusion into postwar society.

Useful films advertise the transition to normalcy, and from ruins to modernity, in various ways. Firstly, by promoting self-management. Repeatedly, La settimana Incom newsreels describe displaced persons, forced to abandon their households because of warfare, that build new houses outside the law, at the outskirts of the cities. For instance, the short *Chi s'aiuta Dio l'aiuta. Si costruiscono una casa i sinistrati di Milano* (God helps whoever helps themselves: The victims of Milan build a house, La settimana Incom, no. 212, IT, November 17, 1948) depicts a new settlement on the southeastern periphery of Milan. While celebrating the industriousness of homeless people who autonomously took care of their condition and build their shacks without any help, the voice-over explains that these dwellings are made of rubble or industrial waste but recreate the conditions for what is maintained as a social cornerstone: the family hearth.<sup>4</sup>

3 *Evviva la vita!* (Hooray for life!, La settimana Incom, no. 32, IT, November 14, 1946), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKthioTFWhA>.

4 See *Chi s'aiuta Dio l'aiuta. Si costruiscono una casa i sinistrati di Milano* (God helps whoever helps themselves: The victims of Milan build a house, La settimana Incom, no. 212, IT, November 17, 1948), [https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000010926/2/nel-quartiere-noto-come-porto-mare-milano-i-senza-tetto-si-autorganizzano-ricostruire-proprie-abitazioni.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:\[%22chi%20s%27aiuta%20dio%20l%27aiuta%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20,%22archiveType\\_st ring%22:\[%22xDamsCineLuce%22\]}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000010926/2/nel-quartiere-noto-come-porto-mare-milano-i-senza-tetto-si-autorganizzano-ricostruire-proprie-abitazioni.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:[%22chi%20s%27aiuta%20dio%20l%27aiuta%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20,%22archiveType_st ring%22:[%22xDamsCineLuce%22]}}). Similar examples are to be found in *Sotto il cielo di*



Sheltering childhood, fostering family life, and producing the opportunities for its thriving are the conditions for moving beyond the transitional phase into stability. To heal the wounds of warfare, protecting abandoned children is the first step. *I figli delle macerie* (Children of the rubble, dir. Amedeo Castellazzi, IT, 1948), a short film produced by the Veterans' National Association, opens with a long pan describing the rubble left behind by the war. Amid them, little orphans wander in the wasteland, on the outskirts of the metropolis; in an unsettling way, their behavior resembles that of adults from the underworld. Little girls paint their faces and stand in sexualized poses, while boys ape gamblers, petty criminals, or firing squads. However, charitable initiatives recover them, through education and a healthy life within comfortable, modern environments. The same can be said of many newsreels, describing the fate of exiles from the Julian March region. After roaming across Italy, they finally find modern, functional settlements, often built thanks to the support of UNRRA, where they can marry, bring up children, and regain the pivot around which they revolve: the hearth.<sup>5</sup>

What is at stake here is moving beyond the state and space of exception, while incorporating its memory. Because of this, while heralding the role of supranational agencies, such as the UNRRA-Casas initiative, these films associate previous ruins with newly introduced modernity, as in *La via del ritorno* (The returning pathway, dir. Romolo Marcellini, IT, 1946–47). The film describes the rubble left behind by the war, in both material and spiritual terms: the wreckage of a village in sun-drenched Southern Italy populated by survivors, a man driven to madness by the mass killings perpetrated by the Nazis in his village, and a young girl showing the scars a German firing squad produced on her legs, and yet surviving by miracle. The endeavor supported by UNRRA-Casas, epitomized by a truck driving through these villages, overcomes this state and space of exception by helping the population create new dwellings. The issue is not wiping away

*Roma. Casette a Montemario* (Under the sky of Rome: Houses in Montemario, La settimana Incom, no. 224, IT, December 15, 1948); *Chi fa da sé. Costruiscono da soli la casa* (Whoever helps themselves. They build themselves their houses, La settimana Incom, no. 259, IT, March 4, 1949). All these newsreels can be found at the institutional website: <https://www.archivioluca.com/>.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: *Per i profughi giuliani. Villaggio alla Cecchignola* (For the refugees from the Julian March: Cecchignola village, La settimana Incom, no. 124, IT, February 25, 1948); *Per i profughi giuliani nasce un villaggio alle porte di Roma* (A village is created on the outskirts of Rome for refugees from the Julian March, La settimana Incom, no. 211, IT, December 11, 1948); *Alloggi U.N.R.R.A. Visita nel Veneto* (UNRRA projects. A visit in Veneto, La settimana Incom, no. 408, IT, February 24, 1950).

the past but keeping it together with the following steps. What is at stake here is tempering modernity with the memory of the past.

Trauma studies scholars argue that carrier groups lead to cultural traumas, that is, social groups having both material and ideal interests in reallocating meanings that had been dislodged by unexpected events or developments. To do so, carrier groups design cultural traumas according to specific cultural tropes and features. With regard to the politics of the memory of World War II, Claudio Fogu and Wulf Kansteiner posit two determinant factors: the generational turnover and the “poetics of history” (Fogu and Kansteiner 2006). By “history” they mean a specific tradition of rendering the past in professional accounts. Historical culture and its leakage in cultural production overall fashion styles of memory. In fact, most of these useful films bring about modernity, while negotiating its advent with the relics of a glorious past. And this continuity between the Roman age and modernity, through Christianity, is a poetics of history shaping the politics of memory.

Western European urban planning and architecture underwent a major cultural shift after World War II. Whereas interwar urban planning relied on modernism, abstraction, and rational design, the postwar one preferred organicism and continuity with the past (Erten, Pendlebury, and Larkham 2015). Furthermore, the massive destruction caused by heavy bombings on European cities created unprecedented opportunities for reconsidering the foundations of the urban environment and the policies of public housing. Postwar humanism and the rising welfare state greatly contributed to this culture.

In Italy the architectural debate incorporated widespread cultural and political concerns about democracy, social inclusion, local diversity, and historical traditions, which coupled this new trend with the issues raised by cinematic neorealism (Escudero 2020; Fabbri 1975; Marmo 2018; Shiel 2006 and 2008; Tafuri 1964 and 1986). Postwar urban planning attempted to tame modernization, adapting it to local circumstances and preserving historic cities. Useful cinema promoting reconstruction and popular housing initiatives rendered this twofold approach visually.

Firstly, most of these films rely on a “before/after” narrative pattern. Reconstruction is successful because it improves the disaster warfare brought onto the nation. Compared to the representation of the past conveyed by most of postwar cinema, partly or fully oblivious of twenty years of Fascist rule, this body of work frequently hints at the responsibilities Italian fascism had in causing the destruction of the nation. Accordingly, it builds democracy *and* national memory, by opposing modern inclusion



Figure 8.1 and 8.2. Mediating classical ruins and new housing needs. 045. *Ricostruzione edilizia* (045. House reconstruction, dir. Vittorio Sala, IT, 1952).

and progress to past authoritarianism and warfare. For instance, *Braccia e lavoro* (Arms and work, dir. Giovanni Pieri, IT, 1952), a short film implicitly promoting public housing and reconstruction, initially juxtaposes war veterans coming home and the rubble of previous households; then it associates the unemployed workforce with totalitarian military parades and

warfare. Therefore, the film narrative sets up two crucial questions: What did veterans coming home find and who is responsible for destruction and social unrest?

Mostly, however, this body of works negotiates modernization with tradition, according to two different tropes: visually embedding new, rational neighborhoods in the past; or incorporating modernity into the landscape, conceived as an anthropological creation.

The past can be depicted as the ruins of Roman buildings, as in *045. Ricostruzione edilizia* (045. House reconstruction, dir. Vittorio Sala, IT, 1952),<sup>6</sup> or as the monuments of Christianity, and notably the Montecassino abbey, as in *Ieri e oggi* (Yesterday and today, dir. Giorgio Ferroni, IT, 1951) and *Cassino anno X* (Cassino year X, dir. Edmondo Albertini, IT, 1954),<sup>7</sup> or the negotiation between expanding urban spaces and the surrounding countryside, as in *Ai margini della città* (On the edge of the city, dir. Giorgio Ferroni, IT, 1954). This latter describes the dissolution of the European city, which is a centripetal, enclosed space. In fact, it portrays the countryside and rural dwellings punctuating the landscape, while extradiegetic music provides an idyllic background. As the camera pans up, huge, rational, modern buildings tower over this landscape. Again, the camera pans left and associates this modern architecture with rural houses. This same pattern recurs later, in bringing together modern neighborhoods and Roman ruins. While the voice-over nostalgically eulogizes the taste and veracity of the past countryside, now surrounded by the advancing city, it visually merges the two spaces, thus mitigating the most alienating effects of the abstract place modernity creates.

The massive endeavor for providing the nation with popular housing between 1949 and 1956 was promoted by negotiating urban design and modern architecture with cultural tradition and local landscape. For instance, in *Uomini e case* (Men and houses, dir. Raffaello Pacini, IT, 1955), urban expansion and new housing cannot dispense with the landscape in the background. This latter is nothing but the living memory of the past generations inhabiting it. The film is a very telling example of the

6 See also *Per i senza tetto. Il Villaggio S. Francesco* (For the homeless: The village St. Francesco, La settimana Incom, no. 263, IT, March 16, 1949). This newsreel can be found at the institutional website: <https://www.archivioluca.com/>.

7 See also *Ricostruzione. La basilica di S. Lorenzo Fuori le Mura prima e dopo la guerra* (Reconstruction: The basilica of S. Lorenzo Fuori le Mura before and after the war), *Notiziario Nuova Luce*, no. 21 (1946). This newsreel can be found at the institutional website: <https://www.archivioluca.com/>.



Figure 8.3. Mediating townscape and countryside. *Ai margini della città* (On the edge of the city, dir. Giorgio Ferroni, IT, 1954).



Figure 8.4. Mediating local traditions and new housing. *Uomini e case* (Men and houses, dir. Raffaello Pacini, IT, 1955).

ideology underpinning the INA-Casa plan and the townscapes it created. In fact, the film's narrative echoes the concerns urban planners had in designing the new neighborhoods in Italy. The INA-Casa plan governance allocated to local teams the responsibility for individual projects, which were supposed to consider regional traditions and cultures as much as the structure of society (Di Biagi 2001 and 2003; Escudero 2020; Pilat 2014). The film opens with a fictional sequence, depicting a young architect visiting his teacher and mentor, who lives in a luxurious, old-fashioned flat in the

center of Rome. However, the elder architect oversees a plan for providing the Italian population with new, modern households. These are located in different areas of the country, in Northern, Central, and Southern Italy. As the voice-over painstakingly explains and the images well illustrate, the endeavor merges all the advantages modernity can offer, in terms of comfort and functionality, while securing traditional ways of living and architectural style. And the relation between the mentor and the younger pupil perfectly incarnates the negotiation between tradition and modernity, or the taming of this latter.

### Envisioning a “Bright New Future” in France

Despite the Vichy regime and its close collaboration with Nazi Germany, and thanks to the Resistance, France joined the ranks of the Allies after the war. Thus, it simultaneously claimed the status of winner and that of victim of the German occupation. The changeover after the Liberation is reflected in non-fiction film by a comparison between “before” and “after,” with the wartime bombing as the tipping point. The “after” refer to the landscapes of destroyed cities, while the “before” recalls the prewar situation of the cities and the monuments.<sup>8</sup> The newsreels and documentaries seem to be confronted with a paradox. The most visible and visually impressive immediate traces of the trauma were not necessarily those of the German occupation, but rather those of the bombings carried out by the Allies to liberate occupied France, without it being possible to attenuate the extent of the devastation. In the immediate postwar period, the Germans were nevertheless presented unambiguously as the only ones responsible for the destruction.<sup>9</sup> The evolution of geopolitical relations and the beginnings of the Cold War, however, led to a rapid evolution of the discourse in the newsreels. The weekly reports testified to the extent of the work to be carried out everywhere in France, but above all contributed to developing the vision, so necessary to the “cultural negotiation.” Indeed, we observe that the reports on French cities produced by *Actualités Françaises*, whatever the state of ruin of the city, always conclude by assuring a radiant future, a future of all possibilities, as if the sometimes almost total destruction of the cities also made it possible to “wipe the slate clean” of the past and the

8 For instance, the documentary *Rouen, martyre d'une cité* (Rouen, martyrdom of a city, Louis Cuny, FR, 1945).

9 See Steinle and Val, in this volume.

compromises of the war.<sup>10</sup> This discourse is all the more striking because it applies exclusively to France and not to the neighboring countries, which were also marked by massive destruction. French newsreels on Germany very frequently end with doubts and questioning of Germany's ability to democratize,<sup>11</sup> and even newsreels on the Netherlands,<sup>12</sup> Belgium,<sup>13</sup> or Great Britain<sup>14</sup> simply record the extent of the work to be done, without prejudging the countries' ability to rebuild or not. The vision of a bright future therefore only applies to France.

This "bright future" is embodied above all in the construction of new modern housing. The challenge faced by the French Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme (MRU, Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Development) is similar to that of the Italian INA-Casa plan: to modernize urban centers and housing, while respecting and integrating local specificities. The fear of having a standard model of housing imposed at the expense of local identity is shared by many French people. Since its creation, the MRU has regularly produced short and medium-length documentaries, in particular to reassure viewers in this respect.<sup>15</sup> In particular, the aim was to explain to the inhabitants the role of the new local interlocutors responsible for rebuilding the cities, that is, the MRU delegates, town planners, and architects like in *Le Bosquet, un village renaît* (Le Bosquet, a village is reborn, dir. Paul de Roubaix, FR, 1945). These films also help to forge a new vision of the future and a new model of society. Indeed, they are both largely anchored in reality and record sometimes unique images of the scale of the destruction and the building sites launched, they do not hide the misery of a whole segment of the population still living in slums, like Marc Cantagrel does in *Se loger* (Finding accommodation, FR, 1948),<sup>16</sup> and at the same time they also contribute to categorizing and normalizing society, particularly with regard to the gendered division of labor. Outdoor construction sites are seen as a male-only world, while women are presented as the primary beneficiaries of indoor modernizations and are increasingly

10 For instance, the end of the report *Ci-gît Le Havre* (Here lies Le Havre, Actualités Françaises, March 2, 1945), <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/afe86003004/ci-git-le-havre>.

11 For instance, *Le quatrième Reich: l'Allemagne de l'Ouest* (The Fourth Reich, West Germany, Actualités Françaises, FR, September 22, 1949), <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/afe85003235/le-quatrieme-reich-l-allemande-de-l-ouest>.

12 For instance, *Réparation du port de Rotterdam* (1948) produced by Pathé.

13 For instance, *La vie qui reprend* (1946), produced by Gaumont in Anvers.

14 For instance, *Londres: reconstruction de la chambre des communes* (1950), produced by Gaumont.

15 See Canteux 2014.

16 Or also Eli Lothar in *Aubervilliers* (1946). See Blüminger 2016.

absent from public spaces. It is particularly striking to observe the evolution of the discourse on women. While the reports of the immediate postwar period show women mainly as hard-working mothers who also embody the continuity of daily life (getting food and shelter) despite the destruction, ten years later their wandering in the streets is mocked and reprimanded, as illustrated by a report on parking in Paris. In *Ily a "stationner et stationner"* (There's "parking" and "parking," FR, June 14, 1955),<sup>17</sup> two women stop their taxi and block all traffic. Another woman then leaves her car on the road to go to the hairdresser. She then causes a traffic jam in which the camera films a close-up of a doctor at the wheel, showing the nuisance and even the potential danger to others that the young woman represents. A policeman immediately reprimands her. The male voice-over comments ironically (and misogynistically) on the sequence. In France, the urban space that has been rebuilt or recovered from the war no longer seems to be suitable for women, who are largely encouraged to leave the public space and confine themselves to their domestic role. Similarly, MRU films and newsreels on the reconstruction completely ignore workers from the colonies, while the beginning of the 1950s saw the development of new slums, particularly in the Paris suburbs, which were home to the "French Muslims," who were then joining the construction sites in increasing numbers. Very few newsreels report on the precariousness and insalubrious conditions in which these workers live. One of the few reports to do so is entitled *Centre d'hébergement nord-africain à Marseille et Lille* (North African accommodation center in Marseille and Lille, FR, 1957).<sup>18</sup> Released in May 1957, when the Algerian war of independence had already started, the report aims first of all to highlight the progress made in housing North African workers through the construction of accommodation centers for them. The slums are mentioned, but the report does not at any time question the segregation of these workers from the rest of the population.

### Taming the 1920s in Germany

Unlike in Italy and France, the reconstruction of the largely destroyed urban centers and especially housing construction was not initially a national project in Germany. Of course, providing shelter for the bombed-out and

17 <https://www.ina.fr/video/AFE85006202/il-y-a-stationner-et-stationner-video.html>.

18 <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/afe85007399/centre-d-hebergement-nord-africain-a-marseille-et-lille>.



homeless population and accommodating arriving refugees and expellees was of utmost urgency in many cities throughout the country. But as long as Germany was occupied and divided into several zones, these problems had to be tackled on a local or regional level.<sup>19</sup> As long as the question of national sovereignty and territorial integrity was still open, however, no particular type of housing became a visually dominant model. In movies of the so-called “rubble film” genre as well as in documentaries and newsreels, the late 1940s were largely defined by images of provisional and temporary dwellings, such as half-destroyed apartments and even caves in the rubble or quickly built barracks such as the iconic Nissen huts of the refugee and displaced person camps. Typical and apparently also visually appealing during this time of transition were former bunkers that had been repurposed as hotels (*Blick in die Welt*, no. 37/1946), maternity clinics (*Welt im Film*, no. 94/1947), or boarding homes (*Der Augenzeuge*, no. 30/1949). But the creative solutions of local initiatives were not only filmed as curiosities for a newsreel audience, they were also echoed in a dramatic shift in the visual representation of destroyed cities. The images of ruins of iconic buildings as traces of once familiar cityscapes soon faded and were replaced with views of anonymous stony landscapes, waiting to be quarried and turned into new building materials—a strategy that was most famously developed by the Trümmerverwertungsgesellschaft (Rubble Recycling Company) in Frankfurt am Main and implemented in many German cities (Jähner 2019, 42–46). As Hannah Arendt observed during a trip to postwar Germany, traumatic restlessness was a cultural core of the reconstruction:

Beneath the surface, the German attitude to work has undergone a deep change. The old virtue [...] has yielded to a mere blind need to keep busy, a greedy craving for something to do every moment of the day. Watching the Germans busily stumble through the ruins of a thousand years of

19 This is reflected in many films from the immediate postwar era that focus on local and regional reconstruction efforts. Films like *Berlin im Aufbau* (Berlin under construction, dir. Kurt Maetzig, GER-Soviet occupation zone, 1946), *Potsdam baut auf* (Potsdam is building up, dir. Joop Huiskens, GER-Soviet occupation zone, 1946), *Halle baut auf* (Halle is building up, dir. Fred Braun, GER-Soviet occupation zone, 1947), *Eine Stadt baut auf—Saarlouis* (A town is building up—Saarlouis, dir. F. B. Nier/B. v. Tyzka, Saar Protectorate, 1950), the serial *Sieh Dich um—Hessen baut auf* (Look around you—Hesse is building up, dir. Alphons Dettenbach, FRG, 1950), *Niedersachsen im Aufbau* (Lower Saxony is being built up, dir. Willi Mohaupt, FRG, 1951), or *Frankfurt am Main—Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau* (Frankfurt am Main—Destruction and reconstruction, Alphons Dettenbach, FRG, 1952) were produced in East and in West Germany and usually targeted local citizens to demonstrate the achievements and the effectiveness of local administrations.

their own history [...] one comes to realize that busyness has become their chief defense against reality. (Arendt 1950)

Useful cinema helped to transform the meaning of rubble and ruins and to turn the reminders of a destroyed past into resources for a better future, thereby not only promoting a pragmatic necessity but also making it a work of cultural trauma.

Half a decade later, West German cities like Frankfurt had become presentable again, as vibrant cities with a high living standard, defined by modern conveniences as well as by a sense of local tradition and identity (Goergen 2015b). The short documentary *Unser Frankfurt heute* (Our Frankfurt today, dir. Ludwig Nau, FRG, 1954) is an exemplary case of locally commissioned promotional films as they have been produced in and for many cities in West Germany. Frankfurt appears as a city defined by a socially and technically modern infrastructure with schools, hospitals, and power plants, but also by familiar institutions such as the zoo, the natural history museum, or the museum of art—popular institutions that were filled with personal memories for local audiences (Unterholzner 2018). The difference between these functional and nostalgic places is underscored by a contrast of modern and historic architecture—while a third kind of space appears to be positioned in the middle of this contrast. In the center of the film—and of Frankfurt itself—we see newly built residential areas which appear modern, but not modernist. Gable roofs, green gardens, and decorative flowers make these neighborhoods appear more suburban than urban—and in fact, the housing developed at the outskirts of the city looks just like that. The voice-over emphasizes the harmony between the modern new and the little that is left of the traditional old. Considering that these new houses were built on the site of the historic city center, which was completely destroyed in the 1944 bombings, this is a remarkable statement. Since the 1920s, the old town has been a highly controversial issue between traditionalist and conservative advocates of local identity and the Neues Frankfurt (New Frankfurt) modernist movement, which pointed out the poor living conditions in the medieval architecture. But this conflict-laden history is completely denied in the film—the modern new Frankfurt created by postwar reconstruction has little to do with the modernist vision of the “New Frankfurt” of the 1920s and its spirit of social reform.

In the early federal republic, the normative model was not welfare-state public housing, but the suburban home of the nuclear family, ideally built with private initiative and as a family space. This becomes particularly clear in films that deal with groups that initially did not benefit from the

achievements of reconstruction. The protagonists of short films like *Ein Dach über dem Kopf* (A roof over your head, FRG, 1950) or *Flüchtlinge helfen sich selbst* (Refugees helping themselves, dir. Peter Patti, FRG, 1951) feel unfairly treated or even marginalized because they do not profit from the social and economic progress and, as proletarians or refugees, still have to live in provisional and cramped postwar dwellings with their families.<sup>20</sup> But instead of promoting public housing schemes and welfare state initiatives, these films stress that the technically and politically modern society allows everyone to get ahead through private initiative and personal willingness.

This was quite different in East Germany. In order to become the home of the German working class, the GDR had to promise to provide decent housing for everyone as a proof of proletarian solidarity. In later years—starting in the 1960s—the *Plattenbau* (structures built with prefabricated concrete slabs) became the iconic cliché of large-scale public housing (if not of all architecture) in the GDR. Before the *Plattenbau* the first prototype of an ideal socialist neighborhood was realized in Berlin in Frankfurter Allee, which was then renamed Stalinallee and lauded as “the street that wears the face of the future” (*Der Augenzeuge*, no. 19, GDR, 1955). In the early 1950s, the entire avenue was filled with apartment blocks in the style of socialist classicism, which served both as “worker palaces” and as a monument to the Stalinist regime. The DEFA newsreel *Der Augenzeuge* regularly reported on progress at the construction site and it later became a severe setback for state propaganda when the uprising of June 1953 began with a strike of construction workers from Stalinallee. In the following year, DEFA released two documentaries about the construction of Stalinallee. *Wir bauen Wohnungen* (We built apartments, dir. Heinz Fischer, GDR, 1952–53) was an educational film that had been commissioned by the Ministry for Reconstruction, while *Die Geschichte einer Straße* (The story of a street, dir. Bruno Kleberg and Walter Marten, GDR, 1954) was mainly based on archival footage and the ongoing newsreel reports about Stalinallee. Even if the films were produced by different departments of DEFA and for different audiences, both films emphasize three basic aspects that make Stalinallee the supposed prototype of socialist housing. First, both films present the generous, modern, and comfortable apartment blocks not only as a part of reconstruction, but foremost as a way out of the miserable living conditions under capitalism; the “imperialist war” here appears not so much as a state of exception, but rather as an extreme form of capitalism. So these

20 Both films can be found in the ViCTOR-E collection on the European Film Gateway, <https://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/search-efg/VICTOR-E>.

“worker palaces” do not only lead out of postwar misery, but put an end to the crisis that proletarian life under capitalism had been. As we can see in *Die Geschichte einer Straße*: “Zille’s Milljö,” the poor proletarian milieu as it was depicted by the Berlin illustrator and photographer Heinrich Zille in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, has only become a memory that the residents of Stalinallee recall through books they can buy in bookshops today. Second, both films emphasize the national importance the Stalinallee has as a beacon project; the entire nation looked at Stalinallee as an example, and the entire nation also contributed materials, resources, and workers, which were sent to Berlin (Hain 1992). Stalinallee is explicitly not a local project of Berlin, but a manifestation of solidarity in the workers’ and peasants’ state. And third, both films emphasize that these buildings were built for a collective. While the generosity, equipment, and furnishing of the individual apartments and plenty of shopping facilities in the street are clearly intended to be reminiscent of a bourgeois (and perhaps even a West German) way of life, both films show the process of moving in and seizing these buildings not as a private, but as a collective process. As seen in *Wir bauen Wohnungen*, the future residents had the opportunity to express their opinions on the building and furnishing plans in public presentations and exhibitions; and the arrival of the first residents, shown in *Die Geschichte einer Straße*, is a political manifestation with banners more than a move-in.

Comparing the films from East and West Germany, it becomes clear that reconstruction in both states was a project of architectural and cultural modernization while also answering certain experiences of modern crises that became directly or indirectly linked to the traumatic past. West German films emphasize the possibility to use modern means for traditional values, introducing the postwar city with its patchwork of old and modern buildings as well as family homes built with concrete without losing their *Gemütlichkeit* (comfortableness) as proof that the ideological oppositions of the Weimar Republic have been reconciled. If reconstruction heals such old wounds from the prewar era, the war becomes falsely remembered as an escalation of these cultural and political conflicts. In a similar way, films from East Germany framed the World War as a violent excess of class war and a consequence of the political struggles in prewar Germany. But in sharp contrast to West Germany, these conflicts do not appear harmonized and reconciled, but found a late, but clear victor: The Soviet Union and with it the people of the GDR. Yet as works of cultural trauma, both strategies have something in common: By remembering World War II as an escalation of modern crisis, they escape questions of guilt and responsibility.

## Conclusions

To summarize, what kind of work did this useful cinema do? By promoting and disseminating the efforts of reconstruction and related modernization, it designed the transition between spaces of exception and new, regulated spaces. All productions surveyed represent the transition from rubble and past dwellings and conditions into modern housing and public spaces. Furthermore, most of these films describe the need to mitigate the most radical effects of modernization and rebut modernist interwar urban planning and architecture by privileging plans and housing incorporating forms of life, society, and constructions that are not oblivious of traditions and communities. The modes of supporting and governing this transition vary, however, according to the political national and international circumstances and the ideological framework regulating them. In the Italian case, useful cinema performed the work of cultural trauma by relocating past meanings—for instance, Roman ruins—outside totalitarian narratives, into a more fitting poetics of history. This latter considered continuity between the antiquity, Christianity, and modernity as a consistent flow, which tamed modernization, comforted local communities by mending social fabric and reactivating their memory, and helped the nation to move forward while looking back. French productions enhanced the “radiant future” awaiting the populace even more, but reassured them that what was to come would not dispense with tradition, including traditional gender roles. The German situation was more complex, because of the polarization induced by the Cold War. Whereas the West German production promoted new housing by selling a model revolving around the family unit and suburbanization, much associated with similar transatlantic developments, the East German model heralded the sense of community and shared endeavor instead. Making sense of rubble and ruins and building new spaces required new communities whose identity was fashioned by different carrier groups according to their respective agendas, thus turning private spaces into public ones.

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## 9. Screening (at) the Workplace

Postwar Non-fiction Cinema and the Gendered and Political Spaces of Labor<sup>1</sup>

*Lucie Česálková and Simone Dotto*

### Abstract

The chapter focuses on the role played by cinema in postwar labor governmentality across Eastern and Western Europe. It considers recruitment, career choice, and instructional films within the wider category of “work-motivated films”—films that provide both a representation of and a social guidance to the working world. These films tended to anchor the representation of labor to differently nuanced “senses of place,” reinterpreting the workplace in terms of social belonging, living conditions, and spatial materiality. Following this threefold characterization, the chapter aims to provide an overview on how film and media intersected labor policies of productivity and of mobilization of workforce, questioning whether the postwar period established a specific mode of presenting men and women at work.

**Keywords:** industrial film; labor history; industry; productivity; Stakh-anovites; human resources

The Czechoslovak short film *Kováci* (Steel men, dir. Jiří Krejčík, CZ, 1946) begins with footage of the ruins of the renowned engineering company Českomoravská Koblén Daněk, accompanied by dramatic, partly distressing, and partly hopeful music. The space of the ruins is deserted, but soon it is replaced by a meeting at which communist politician Antonín Zápotocký, soon to become Czechoslovakia’s prime minister and president, speaks to the workers, motivating them to work in the nationalized postwar industry. The

1 “This chapter was conceived and developed by the authors in close collaboration. Originally Lucie Česálková drafted the introduction and the ‘Workplace as Homeplace’ paragraph, while Simone Dotto drafted the ‘A Human Proof Environment’ paragraph and the conclusion. The ‘Man in the Machinery’ paragraph was written jointly”



Figure 9.1. *Kováři* (Steel men, dir. Jiří Krejčík, CZ, 1946).

empty space is soon filled with workers collaborating to restore the factory and, symbolically, the whole industry, the whole country. There are no other spoken words in the film except Zápotocký's speech, and the film focuses solely on the work efforts and ends with a song about friendship at work. As such, *Kováři* depicts the postwar public space as a site of transformation, as a space of work and political negotiation, while highlighting that the reconstruction was a process carried out by human forces.

In this chapter we focus on the role played by cinema in postwar labor governmentality across Eastern and Western European countries and on how films, alongside other media, contributed to mobilizing and managing manpower throughout the processes of reconstruction and socioeconomic reorganization. To fully account for the medium's manifold and distributed agency in disciplining laborers and in shaping their conduct as a collective body (Grieverson 2018), our reference corpus will include different specimens of what could be collectively defined as "work-motivated films"—that is, films providing both a representation *of* and a social guidance *to* the working world. Compared to the other, stricter categorizations of corporate- and trade union-sponsored films already provided by the existing scholarship on industrial (Zimmerman 2009) and labor cinema (Godfried 2014), our selection will be less tied to the nature of commissioning institutions, and more on the shared rhetoric and logic of rationalization through which they appealed to the (potential) workers as recipients (Hediger and Vonderau 2009). As a matter of fact, in the aftermath of World War II European workers were likely to encounter film's guidance on every stage along their process of reintegrating into society: from the search for a new occupation to the initial moment

of recruitment, from vocational training to daily work routines. Following this ideal path of an individual “getting back to work” we will distinguish three successive stages along the process and three correspondent types of work-motivated films. As a first group, *films about career choice*, most often sponsored by labor institutes and psychotechnical centers or by the ministries under whose authority labor policies fell, offered methods to assess and evaluate individual work skills and highlighted a rational approach to career choice and (re)education, concurrently making visible the needs of postwar labor policies and job markets. The second group consists of *recruitment films*, commissioned either by the human resources and public relations departments in individual enterprises or by the campaigns of national or supranational organizations. They usually focus on single professions, pointing to the importance of renewing the economy, or on a specific work environment, trying to attract new employees by illustrating the benefits of workfare politics. As a third and final group, we will consider those “process” and “training films” under the broader label of *instructional films*. Sponsored either by national and supranational agencies or directly by the enterprises to be distributed through work organizations’ inner circuits and shown directly in the workplace as part of professional training. Overcoming their strictly technical function, these films often fulfilled a distinctly disciplinary and prescriptive purpose, establishing the ideal work performance and the way to achieve it, and promoting awareness and loyalty for the work environment.

One reason for considering all these specimens at once is to better describe the production of sponsored film as a fragmented institutional field, where different social and political agencies coexisted. In the aftermath of the war, several transnational organizations joined the state government bodies, typically the ministries under which the work agenda fell. Local, national, and international organizations all worked jointly to nurture new social values with efforts to promote collective participation in economic recovery, restoration of demolished sites, construction of new infrastructures and, even more crucially, to increase the efficiency and the rationalization of work methods. In this context, as we will argue, the agency of the film medium intertwined a number of labor efficiency logics, supported various rhetorical appeals, and contributed to achieving distinct goals in partial campaigns. These appeals, albeit coming from different directions, can be read as interconnected and mutually supportive in individual films, joining forces toward the common objectives to enroll, persuade, and instruct (potential) employees as members of a renewed society. Another reason is that it may facilitate the emergence of widespread discursive, semantic, and aesthetic features. Considered altogether, work-motivated films produced

for different aims in different political and geographical contexts cooperate in anchoring the public conception of labor to different *senses of place*. In particular, depending on the instrumental mandate they were supposed to fulfill, films tended to stress the broad relevance of the “workplace” by alternately reinterpreting the notion in terms of *social belonging* (i.e., workplace as one’s place in society), *living conditions* (i.e., workplace as a place to live), and *spatial materiality* (i.e., the actual places where people work).

In the following text we will detail these differently nuanced characterizations of the workplace as a represented space and a space of representation. The first section will illustrate how national and international entities using films to promote productivity ended up investing workers’ duties with a crucial social relevance, regardless of their different ideological, political, or economic agendas. The second section will shift the attention to the way film propaganda followed the logics of demobilization and reconversion of workforce by emphasizing the advantages of specific professions and raising workers’ awareness on the requirements of the job market. In the third section we will deal with how work-motivated films represented human labor in the workplace, discussing the continuities and discontinuities with the visual conventions in use during wartime in the aestheticization of the industrial context and of the human–machine relationship. Throughout our analysis, we will pay attention to the specificities and the similarities of labor discourses and policies in Western and Eastern European countries, at the same time questioning whether the postwar period established a specific mode of presenting humans at work and how it differed from the previous ones. In its multiple meanings, the workplace will constitute here a privileged point for observing intersections between different concepts of labor and between the different visions of its role in the further development of society.

### **Man in the Machinery: Transideological Theories of Labor Organization and the Human Element**

In postwar social policies, the very idea of productivity became a quite distinctive notion and a recurring rhetorical motif in discourses on labor organization across different (when not opposite) cultures and industrial systems. In Western European countries, the drive to modernize industrial production and the transfer of American models of labor management were mainly channeled through the institutions established in the wake of the European Recovery Plan. The European Productivity Agency (EPA) was founded in 1953 by the decision of the countries involved in the Organisation

for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), furthering in turn the creation of National Productivity Centers (NPCs) in sixteen countries (see Boel 2003). These agencies operated jointly with industry-led federal bodies such as the Comité Européen pour le Progrès Economique et Social (CEPES, European Committee for Economic and Social Progress) toward the common goal of raising consensus around the new logics of work organization by contributing respectively to the circulation of films sponsored by the Marshall Plan (usually designed for lay audiences) and those produced by private enterprises (tailored to specific industrial sectors and groups of workers). In this context, emphasis on productivity served both a communicational and a tactical function, as it was “perceived as an apolitical instrument that turned the transition to a prosperous, peaceful society into a problem of engineering, not of politics” (Fritsche 2018, 104). The notion thus constituted an easy (and apparently neutral) subject for film propaganda and was introduced to European audiences with didactic tones. Animation films such as *Meno Fatica ... Più Denari* (Less fatigue ... more money, dir. Enrico De Seta, IT, 1950) and *Productivité* (Productivity, dir. Jacques Asseo, FR, 1952) emphasized how large-scale, mechanized industrial production could improve workers’ living standards, at the same time naturalizing the new organizational methods as the latest, unavoidable steps in human progress. When not addressed as a general concept, productivity was hinted at by foregrounding the case histories of singular locations, organizations, and laborers. Sponsored by the Italian National Productivity Center, *Un’idea in cammino* (An idea on its way, dir. Guido Rosada, IT, 1953) shows the advantages of the new work methods, staging the stories of a laborer and his daughter, employed in a factory in Vicenza. At first skeptical of the new industrial policies, they both end up being awarded for proposing their own ideas to improve production methods and to embellish the working environment. Whereas the rational principles of work organization (“the brain is your engine”) were explained with animated sequences, workers’ personal gains and enterprising spirit implied by productivity were better communicated by “exemplary tales.”

At the same time, European states under the aegis of the Soviet Union pursued their own politics of productivity by embracing the principles of centralized state-planned economy, transplanting Stalinist production methods and adapting them to the national context with the objective of turning young generations of workers and former peasant laborers into a new, socialist work culture (see Pittaway 2002). As Adrian Grama argues,

the politics associated with raising productivity, first to reach prewar output levels and then to confirm the efficiency of state socialism,

defined an entire historical epoch, mediating the transition out of the war economy and setting the trajectory of growth for much of the 1950s. (Grama 2019, 13)

In this case, non-fiction cinema also served as an instrument to set moral standards and call upon laborers' commitment to a faster work pace. As explicitly stated in the Czechoslovak magazine *Hospodář*, "increasing performance in all fields, especially where our economy has suffered from war" was named as the essential agenda of the short film, according to the author of the article, and was already well fleshed out in films like *Boj o uhlí* (Struggle for coal, dir. Kurt Goldberger, CZ, 1946), *Stroje nesmí stát* (Machines must not stand still, dir. Jindřich Ferenc, CZ, 1947), and *Národ sobě* (The nation, to itself, dir. Karel Baroch, CZ, 1947) etc. (Maršík 1947).<sup>2</sup>

Whether imported from the US by the liberal democratic states of Western Europe or re-adapted to the state-controlled economy of socialist regimes, all variables of large-scale scientific management theories that gained hegemony in the postwar debate were built on the intellectual legacy of the interwar period. Nevertheless, the need to rely on wide consent and to make leverage on collective effort for the reconstruction gave a renewed significance to those elements that could come in handy for enhancing manpower's motivations to participate in the production process. Specific institutes within the Western framework of OEEC and UNESCO were devoted to researching and discussing the notion "human factor," in an attempt to promote awareness of "human relations" in the workplace as an inherent part of the training programs for business managers. Besides refining scientific management theories and filling the gaps of the Taylorist model, the adoption and re-elaboration of Elton Mayo's original "human management" paradigm suited postwar reconstruction for both practical and political reasons. While it aimed at settling potential worker/manager conflicts within a framework of welfare and mutual cooperation, it also provided "a nexus of disciplinary practices aimed at making employees' behaviour and performance predictable and calculable—in a word, manageable" (Townley 1993, 538; see also Bruce and Niland 2011). On the thrust of the human relations-themed conferences promoted within the context of the Marshall Plan between

2 This is evidenced for instance by the fact that, according to Alf Lüdtke, one of the most typical reasons for workers leaving East Germany was dissatisfaction with the irregularity of work, its inconsistency, and the desire to "finally be able to work properly" (Lüdtke 2008). Eastern European work was thus perceived as inefficient despite all the proclamations of rational improvement of methods.

the late 1940s and the 1950s, the introduction of the human management paradigm was mostly supported by the exponents of the emerging fields of labor psychology and industrial sociology, particularly in countries like France and Italy, whereby productivity politics encountered a strong opposition by trade unions and national communist parties (Tanguy 2008; Franco 2010). At approximately the same time, some exponents of social sciences were also involved in the European filmological movement, promoting the “cinematic fact” as an object worthy of sociological and psychological study (see Hediger and Kirsten 2015). It was not uncommon for some influential scholars and policymakers to have their say in both fields, as in the case of Italian sociologist Camillo Pellizzi. Even before entering the OEEC’s Human Factors division in 1953, Pellizzi had contributed in the filmological debate by paying attention to the potential of cinema and mass media as instruments for “social action” and advocating their use in the “re-humanization process” of industrial labor (Pellizzi 1949, 30). While finding their way through the decision-making processes of business organization, exponents of social sciences who promoted the “human management” paradigm provided firms and public institutions with theoretical concepts and empirical methods to motivate and discipline workers. In so doing, they significantly contributed to turning the persuasiveness of cinematic representation into one powerful string for the bow of human resources departments.

During the interwar period, European socialist economies had moved away from the previously imported methods of industrial engineering to embrace a “distinctly Soviet” politic of productivity that went under the name of Stakhanovism. By the mid-1930s, scientists such as Aleksei Gastev and other Soviet Taylorists (see Beissinger 1988) had lost their influence in favor of a supposedly “grassroots” movement, where workers themselves spontaneously strived to improve labor organization and increase production. According to Lewis H. Siegelbaum, Stakhanovism was an artificial campaign by which high-level Soviet politicians sought to deal with the threat posed to the party’s hegemony by efficient industrial management (Siegelbaum 1988). By shifting the emphasis from efficiency theories to the workers’ effort, the party could present any achievement in industrial production as the result of popular will, while encouraging the workforce’s “spontaneous” initiative. In parallel to the Western theories of human management, the foregrounding of the “human element” came here to fit the purposes of political-economical propaganda and those of social managing: upholding the case of single individuals as exemplary models of hard work was meant to make leverage on the other workingmen’s spirit of emulation and sense of belonging.



As heroes of the Soviet world, the Stakhanovites often expanded from their class through a strong media coverage of their life stories and, as stated by Sheila Fitzpatrick, formed “a new social status group that might be called ordinary celebrities” (Fitzpatrick 2000, 74). As a result of this status shift, they were, on the one hand, expected to act as visible role models and transferees of experience, but, on the other hand, they gradually lost real contact with the original working conditions and moved away from the environment they were supposed to represent. In Czechoslovakia, the Stakhanovites in the early 1950s were referred to as “a new type of worker,” as people “culturally educated in technology, showing patterns of accuracy and great skills at work, [...] people who mastered technology, know how to use it to the limit, work according to all the rules of art” (Kammari 1951, 263). In this conception, the difference between a Stakhanovite and a capitalist worker lay precisely in this artistry, in “culturalism” and “soulfulness” (Kammari 1951, 263). The essence of Stakhanovism was understood as “overcoming the difference between physical and mental work” and achieving the “culturally technical rise of the working class” (Kammari 1951, 263). The way to reach this qualitative intersection of physical work and mental renewal was mutual learning and the dissemination of knowledge through visual media, especially film. The Soviet Stakhanovites arriving in Czechoslovakia (also in the spirit of mutual transfer of experience between Soviet and Czechoslovak workers; see Kaplan 1993, 50) presented early 1950s Stakhanovite film newsreels, short films, photographs, and newspaper articles as proof that the government “values the work of Stakhanovites and [...] cares about the dissemination of their knowledge” (Sysel 1951, 18–19). The ideology of Stakhanovism thus understood visual media in a twofold sense. They served both as a means of mutual education of workers and as a cultivating instruction that, through concrete human role models, deprives the learning process of simple instrumentality and enhances it with cultural-geographical dimension of enrichment of centers and peripheries. Therefore, in Czechoslovak films promoting Stakhanovism, workers were not portrayed as a movement organized to increase productivity, but primarily as individuals whose improved methods helped to make work more efficient, for with more rational procedures one would achieve greater results in less time. These new methods were then, with the help of visual media, to be disseminated and reproduced by workers throughout the country. Similar to their East German counterpart, represented by the Hennecke movement, the role of increasing productivity through rationalization and mutual learning was pointed out. Both in the case of Adolf Hennecke and of the Czechoslovak “shock worker” Václav Svoboda, films and newsreels



Figure 9.2. *Úderník Svoboda* (Shock Worker Svoboda, dir. František Lukáš, CZ, 1950).

such as *Der 13. Oktober* (The 13th of October, dir. Andrew Thorndike, GDR, 1949) and *Úderník Svoboda* (Shock Worker Svoboda, dir. František Lukáš, CZ, 1950) devoted themselves to examples of how this worker distributes his knowledge to others, who then take the knowledge to regional factories. At the same time, these films present the working process as a matter of a public affair, highlighting the activist role of both Hennecke and Svoboda.

Although ideologically differentiated, human relations management, laboretism,<sup>3</sup> and Stakhanovism all tended toward the same goal—the perfect performance of the individual in the work process. This aim resulted in the rhetorical establishment of work as a virtue based on a vision of satisfaction for the individual and a necessity for the running of the economy. One of the common tasks of the postwar media was to build on these continuities, present themselves as responsible agents of political, economic, and social goals, and at the same time to manifest differences from interwar productivity and war mobilization. While formally talking to laborers, work-motivated film propaganda often addressed their sense of responsibility as citizens and a part of national communities, merging the interests of the individual with those of the state. This applies especially to those (socialist or capitalist) countries which were experiencing profound political

3 Laboretism (in Czech “*laboretismus*”) was a technocratic-based thought movement with its roots in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1920s, whose followers preferred central planning, demanded the active participation of the state in economic development, and supported the advance of psychotechnics to recognize ideal human talents. They also called for the purposeful management of the politics of work, population migration, and settlement (Verunáč 1934).

and economic changes, either approaching nationalization or adopting a new government regime. In the above mentioned 1946 film *Kováči*, the then chairman of the Central Council of Trade Unions of Czechoslovakia, Antonín Zápotocký, spoke to the workers: “How soon these ruins will be removed depends now on the work of each of you. I believe that a new plant will soon grow on the ruins, thanks to you.” As Zápotocký addresses the workers at the ruins of the factory he stresses that the new work is free and at the same time it is work that will benefit not only the employers but also the workers themselves—the work will directly improve their standard of living as they work together in a nationalized industry. The memento of war in this film becomes both a part of the motivation to participate in the construction and a starting point for defining oneself against the old order of interwar capitalism.

Significantly, the same rhetorical devices could be employed in other geopolitical latitudes, as happens in a later film *Braccia e lavoro* (Arms and work, dir. Giovanni Pieri, IT, 1952), sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Labor and accounting for the achievements of postwar policies. When illustrating the high unemployment rate, as if to prevent any possible objection from the spectator, it establishes an explicit comparison with the recent Fascist past.

Was it all better back then? But in those days it was forbidden to talk about unemployment. [...] Maybe if you liked this job, the profession of arms, that was soon turned in the profession of war, in Africa and Spain [...] until the last one, [...] until the ultimate collapse. These idle hands came as a result.

Quite didactically, the spoken comments mark the sudden appearance onscreen of wartime footage, alternating images of marching soldiers, firing guns, collapsing houses and buildings, and finally arriving at a close-up of the inactive hands of the workers as an iconic representation of the unemployed condition. Viewers' acceptance of the postwar social issues and their understanding of the advantages brought by the democratic system are elicited by contrast with the previous Fascist government and the wartime regime and with the ruins they left behind.

Lüdtke suggested that, as postwar reconstruction was dependent on human labor, hard work was promoted as a way to “self-purification, self-healing, and a better future” (Lüdtke 2008, 242). The metaphor of work as healing was based on the traumatic experience of war and supported the idea of interconnection of the individual and the collective. Crossing ideological adherence and geopolitical positions, postwar films invariably



Figure 9.3. *Ich und Mr. Marshall* (*Me and Mr. Marshall*, dir. Stuart Schulberg, DE-West, 1948).

showcase images of the worker as intrinsically linked to the national and supranational communities outlined by the recovery plans. As Hans Fischer, a fictitious German miner relocated in the Ruhr industrial area and protagonist of the United States Information Service (USIS)-sponsored film *Ich und Mr. Marshall* (*Me and Mr. Marshall*, dir. Stuart Schulberg, DE-West, 1948) says:

And the engine is turning over. I like being part of this. It's something big and good and I think it's gonna pay off, for Europe, for Germany, and yes, for me too. That's why I am down here, eight hours a day, six days a week. Name? Hans Fischer. The profession? Just call me Mr. Marshall's employee.

Hans Fischer's interpretation comes through a description of the mutual relationships between industry, production, and trade, but also individual European states, to identify the miner with the Marshall Plan. This image (and the rhetoric associated with it) established an ethos of individual–collective responsibility and the interdependence of personal and collective well-being over national borders, while at the same time evoking an impression of guilt if a worker does not behave properly. Personal responsibility for the state's economic performance was shown in some films quite literally, by stopping the machine (and the moving image) in a freeze-frame, depicting a situation where the individual defies the system. The universal problem, when work on a particular machine stops, is also used in Czechoslovak films *Hutě volají* (*Foundries are calling*, dir. Karel Kabeláč, CZ, 1950) or *Chlapi ze žuly* (*Granite men*, dir. Karel Baroch, CZ, 1949). Even more explicit

is the example of the film *Zrcadlo* (Mirror, dir. Drahoslav Holub, CZ, 1948): here the stopped image represents the stalled industry, stalled planning, stalled economy, and the voice-over calculates the consequences that such a moment would bring to both the whole and the individual. By analogy, the films made extensive use of the motifs of wheels spinning, engines or machines starting to emphasize the idea of working together as a new beginning and again to point out the interdependence of the individual and the whole of the economy.

### **Workplace as Homeplace: Reconversion and (De)mobilization of Workforce from the Warfront to the Homefront**

Like every other resource after the end of the war, human resources also had to be reconverted and relocated. The reconstruction project not only entailed an increase in productivity but also labor (de)mobilization, job transfers, and a run of massive training and retraining activities for people who either did not receive any qualifications during the war or where it was desirable for them to be engaged in completely different professions than those in which they worked previously. Re-education, requalification, and similar terms came to signify not simply an update in working methods but an overall transformation of personal habits and living conditions that often started from one's place of staying.

This type of logic is exemplified by the plot of the Western German film *Heimat ist Arbeit* (Home is work, dir. Bernhard Redetzki, FRG, 1949). By telling the fates of four refugees, displaced persons, or returnees after the end of World War I, the film shows not only the immediate involvement of people in postwar reconstruction, but also combines the ethos of work and diligence with the hope and the necessity to find a new home (that is, a place in society). Similarly, the already mentioned *Braccia e lavoro* called for reintegration in postwar society, emphasizing the demand for skilled jobs (engineers, electricians, carpenters, etc.). Although in this case the narrative does not directly take the characters' perspectives (as it does in *Heimat ist Arbeit*), it still calls upon viewers' personal memories by comparing images of war remnants hustling a living, on the one hand, and those of qualified professionals' coordinated group work, on the other. The German and Italian films share a common understanding of job-hunting and home-finding as closely intertwined processes. They both present the characters' encounters with welfare institutions and state administration as decisive turning points along war survivors' life paths, invariably leading

to their full acknowledgment as members of the new society and to their reintegration into the respective homeland.

As suggested by this insistence on file cabinets, bulletin boards, and the interiors of employment and migration offices, the re-education projects that participated in the management of the labor market were not merely ideological but rather logistical campaigns. They responded to the massive movement of refugees and displaced persons across Europe, to changes in borders and to the building of new state units. Forced movements of people have historically always meant (and continue to mean) the need for economic integration into the new system and provoke new transformations in the labor market. Specific institutions such as the Czechoslovak Osídlovací úřad (Settlement Office), the Staatsbeauftragter für das Flüchtlingswesen in Germany (State Commissioner for Refugees), and others have joined the media field of the producers of films motivating labor. In the wake of the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia's western borderlands, the Sudetenland,<sup>4</sup> some journalists in Czechoslovakia even related the need to increase the production of instructional films to train people in professions typical for borderland manufactures. Admitting to German mastery in the Czechoslovak textile or ceramic industry while not hiding his hatred, journalist and art historian Karel Šourek pointed out that it cannot be assumed that people forced to leave Czechoslovakia would have any motivation to pass on their experience to Czechs and Slovaks. These experts, he said, should be replaced by a film that would, "even before the expulsion of Germans and their specialists, [...] capture all the decades of experience at the hands of the people who lived and worked in our state and misappropriated it so much that they have to get out in the shortest time" (Šourek 1946, 202). Such an instructional film was meant to maintain the continuity of production and experience, to evaluate the importance of the human element in long-term developed working methods and literally replace the act of training in a politically escalating situation.

On other occasions, film propaganda advocated the relocation of laborers in the wake of market flows of raw materials. USIS-sponsored recruitment film *Dans les mines d'Europe* (In the mines of Europe, dir. John Ferno,

4 First decided during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, while the national government was still in exile, the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from the country became officially operative in 1945 with the Potsdam Conference. In the following year, under the presidency of Edvard Beneš, more than 2.5 million people were forced by local authorities to move either to Western (1,750,000) or Eastern Germany (750,000). The racial, nationalist, social, and political implications of the massive and violent expulsion have been discussed in length (see Smelser 1996).

BG-UK-FRG-IT, 1954) offered an overview on the living conditions of migrant miners. Directed and produced by the Marshall Plan's prolific filmmaker John Ferno with the footage shot by local units in Italy, Belgium, German, and Scotland, the documentary shortly followed the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community with the aim to raise international audiences' awareness of the need to make labor and supplies of raw materials meet beyond national borders. The narrative intercuts the exemplary stories of miners coming from the depressed and rural land of Scotland, East Germany, and Italy, who move with their families to the industrialized areas of, respectively, Wales, the Ruhr district, and Belgium. An illiterate worker coming from Sicily, Sandro Cordaro's character exemplifies the routes of thousands of miners who had been relocated in accordance with a Belgian–Italian agreement signed by the Italian government to reduce unemployment rates. While admitting that “the ways of the heart move slower than the world around us,” the film also carefully details the many rewards implied by assisted work migration: a good salary, safer working conditions, and a house for the whole family—which as the narrating voice positively states, “is always the best argument to persuade workers to move to an industrial center.”<sup>5</sup>

It is significant that, whether the films followed the stories of refugees integrating into the work of postwar reconstruction (such as *Heimat ist Arbeit*), encouraged the settlement of regions and the start-up of factories abandoned by displaced ethnicities (*Osidlujeme pohraničí* [We inhabit the borderlands, dir. Ivan Frič, CZ, 1949]), or invited workers to move abroad in order to keep the same job (*Dans les mines d'Europe*), their rhetorical appeal was fundamentally similar: they used the psychological dimension of work as self-fulfillment and developed it in a collectivist spirit of cooperation on joint work of reconstruction. Moving from this shared premise, the homeplace–workplace equation could lead in different directions: the path of return from the warfront and the quest for a new place in society might end up leading to a different occupation as well as to a different place to live.

Narrowing the focus on the female characters of the aforementioned films unearths further (and sometimes complementary meanings) of the homeplace–workplace equation. The former actress staged in *Heimat ist*

5 By 1946 more than 50,000 Italian miners had been moved to the Wallonia region following the agreement made by the Italian government with Belgium, offering manpower in exchange for raw materials. The improved living standards and safer work conditions promised by film propaganda were, however, soon to be undercut by major mining disasters, such as the one that occurred in Marcinelle in 1956 (see Colucci 2008).

*Arbeit* continues to hope to return to her profession, but conciliatorily accepts the various professions in which she can apply, from working in the textile industry to making wafers, effectively embodying the postwar job market's expectations of women. Italian and British miners' wives in *Dans les mines d'Europe* appear prone to follow their husbands everywhere as soon as they can see the chance of having a modern, newly equipped house, outlining the main trajectory of the female workforce's demobilization in the aftermath of the war. As noticed by Francisca De Haan, whereas reconstruction in the state socialist economies of Eastern Europe largely relied on the involvement of female workers, in the discourse dominant in the Western liberal democracies,

women's place was in the home, this is where they belonged and were happy, and "staying at home" was what the capitalist system allowed them to do. It was "natural" for women to be full-time housewives and mothers, with a breadwinner-husband earning the family income. (De Haan 2012, 161)

In this sense, the use of a highly emotional register in presenting the miners' wives and their constant concerns about kids and family seem primarily addressed to female spectators making leverage on their allegedly inner desire for "normalcy," stability, and domesticity. Alongside the story of the European miners, who looked for a new workplace abroad and ended up finding a new place to live, *Dans les mines d'Europe* also features a secondary narrative, in which the female characters find their own social and individual fulfillment as soon as they find a household to take care of. When asked by her husband whether she will ever find a job in a foreign land, the British miner's wife answers, "I'd have way too much work to do if only we had a place of our own."

This strict gender division of employment did not prevent neither the women from being acknowledged as active stakeholders in the process of economic recovery, nor the domestic environment from being reorganized in the wake of the productivity drive. In young Western European democratic societies such as Italy and France, women obtained the right to vote approximately at the same time that they began experiencing wider access to consumer goods thanks to the postwar economic policies. The recognition of their authority in national politics came in parallel with the institutionalization of their role as "citizen consumers" directing family economies, providing children for the nation, and supporting the new free-market system through purchases. As Rebecca Pulju pointed out,



this “feminine variant” of citizenship was grounded on the assumption that, even when women might be thought of as “naturally” belonging to the house, “consuming skills did not come naturally, but through education and training” (Pulju 2011, 12). Film came to help, once again, as an instructional aid and a social guidance in re-education campaigns specifically addressed to housewives. Elaborating on the legacy of the Frankfurt kitchen and Lillian Gilbreth’s research (see Sturtevant 2014), even after the war, a number of institutions focused on efficient and productive housekeeping and tried to make women’s work easier by studying the movements of housework (Perers 2020). Produced by Zeit im Film, a production company financed with American funds, the short film *Jede Frau kann zaubern* (Every woman can do magic, dir. Alfred E. Sistig, FRG, 1952) was meant for the female audience in the German Federal Republic, whereby, by the early 1950s, the rates of women employed in wage jobs were still significantly low, especially if compared to the ones in the eastern half of Germany (Carter 1997). With the objective to instruct the viewers on the advantages of productive housework, the film focuses directly on the kitchen environment, aiming to show women the benefits of efficient kitchen arrangements in differently defined work areas. “Magic in the home” is identified here with rationalizing individual tasks and the resulting efficiency of labor. The same call for rational methods also informed those films advertising to housewives in rural areas, who, albeit being excluded from the waged job markets, had farming activities to run. Released in 1954, a date by which the people in the French countryside had also already significantly increased their chances to purchase consumer goods and to mechanize their households with home technologies (Pulju 2011, 171), *Une femme à la campagne* (A woman in the countryside, dir. Marcel Bluwal, FR, 1954) exemplified the modernization of farming work by providing the example of a young woman who had been trained in a management school. To reaffirm her traditional caring obligations, the film’s opening shot shows a domestic scene with a newborn baby and the fireplace in the foreground.

Something new and unexpected, however, appears in the background, where the female heroine is shown doing the math and calculating the family expenses—some of her new work duties as a household “manager.” The protagonist describes her working day routines, illustrating how her training had proven useful to work more effectively while sharing the newly acquired methods and skills with the viewer. The stories in both *Jede Frau kann zaubern* and *Une femme à la campagne* give voice to a gendered variant of the Western discourses on productivity, according to which the



Figure 9.4. *Une femme à la campagne* (A woman in the countryside, dir. Marcel Bluwal, FR, 1954).

homeplace *is* the workplace, and as such requiring rational and efficient management.<sup>6</sup>

### **A Human-Proof Environment: Representation of the Workplace and Aesthetics of the Working Bodies**

Capturing laboring bodies in proper workplaces might be the most obvious task assigned to work-motivated film but, it is no less loaded with political implications because of this. Jean-Louis Comolli famously argued that cinema traditionally fails in representing human labor: as a “machine for the fabrication of the visible,” the camera is irresistibly driven to the “organized visibility of machines” (Comolli 1998, 19). It is automatically

drawn to its spectacular dimension, the dance of body and machine that obscures salaried labor’s oppressive nature. This is the typical fodder of the kind of films that companies make about themselves, which

6 In the Italian case, instructional films on home management started being produced intensively between the late 1950s and the 1960s. Specialized film labels such as Film Giada released *Grammatica della Massaia* (A housewife’s grammar, dir. Giuliano Tomei, IT, 1961), a series of short films serving as an audiovisual primer on domestic economy. The film series was distributed through the institutional circuit (Centro Progresso Educativo) and sponsored by a household appliances manufacturer (the Italian branch of the General Electric Company). In addition to providing basic notions about home management, these films targeted female spectators by proposing prescriptive models of family life and female behavior.

concentrate on work's choreographed gestures to the exclusion of its duration, its harshness, its wear and tear on the worker, and its fatigue. (Comolli 1996, 39–44)

The French theorist's position may be considered representative of an entire line of thought which had already proved particularly influential in Marxist criticism, focusing on the inherent techno-ideological ties between the film apparatus and industrial capitalism, and consequently dismissing any resulting representation as "spectacularizing" work.

When confronted with the varied composition of postwar discourse and iconography, however, such statements prove to be too generalizing. Idealization is just one of the manifestations of the relationship between media and industrial work, whose faceted complexity can hardly be explained as a solely techno-ideological matter. In fact, not only the "spectacularizing" of work is a broader cultural-social process in which cinema participated as one of many agents of visual culture of the time, but also in non-fiction cinema itself representation of work can take different forms. For instance, whereas usually hidden in state and company-sponsored films, the exploitation of workers was instead foregrounded in those productions sponsored by trade unions or by Western communist parties. Films like *Nel mezzogiorno qualcosa è cambiato* (In the South something has changed, dir. Carlo Lizzani, IT, 1950), and *Vivent les dockers* (Long live the dockers, dir. Robert Ménégóz, FR, 1951) chronicled the strikes that had occurred respectively in the factories of Southern Italy and in the French ports. The workers' undignified conditions are explicitly addressed and staged with a totally different series of "choreographic gestures," in which laborers take over the machines or refuse to operate them, turning the workplace into a space of fraternal coexistence and collective mobilization. While in their countries of origin they were made invisible in various ways, encountering censorship or suffering limited distribution,<sup>7</sup> these films were presented in Eastern Europe as evidence of capitalist exploitation. However, while Lizzani's and Ménégóz's films were celebrated at the Karlovy Vary International Festival as examples of socialist documentaries, workers in Czechoslovakia accounted for 20 to 30 percent of the victims of political persecution (Heumos 2006, 21). When riots and strikes took place in key Czechoslovak industrial plants, the

7 While *Vivent les dockers* was banned from national circulation by French censorship, *Nel Mezzogiorno qualcosa è cambiato* was heavily redacted. Any spoken comment or image related to the farmers' occupation of the land was cut not to "disrupt public order." Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri—Ufficio Centrale Cinematografia, 1951 (visto n. 7611), <https://cinecensura.com/wp-content/uploads/1950/05/Nel-Mezzogiorno-qualcosa-%C3%A8-cambiato-1950-Carlo-Lizzani.pdf>.

Communist Party sought to make these events invisible by emphasizing the media idealization of the Stakhanovites. As this example shows, under different conditions the same films (and the same representations) can fulfill completely different functions—the choice to emphasize certain aspects of the collective depends on the ideological framing of film circulation and on the political tactics of their distribution. A critical scrutiny of how cinema made work visible therefore cannot just stick to merely questioning of images as captured from the film apparatus, but also needs to inquire into the political agenda behind these images—whom and for what purposes these representations served, and which audiences were they addressed to.

Whereas workers' oppression and suppression might have been made occasionally visible for the purposes of Cold War propaganda, idealized images of labor constituted power tactics for both Western and Eastern governmental policies to show primarily useful and disciplined bodies. This is the case of most "instructional films," whose technical aim was to train workers to perform specific tasks. In Western European countries, USIS contributed to popularizing the use of visual aids and, with them, some long-standing formats such as the one of "process films." Local editions of films sponsored by the Federal Security Agency and the US Office of Education were commissioned by ECA and circulated through its transnational channels. The unquestionably concrete character of the operations described gets aestheticized by means of a linear, step-by-step visualization of the process that was supposed to be universally readable, appealing to workers' rational knowledge in the US as well as in any other country. Particularly in those films covering aspects of the production chains, from "engine maintaining and repairing" to "coppersmithing," the workingman's body is taken as a unit of "living labor." It gets visually decontextualized and "disassembled" in several close-ups of hands and arms—shown just in those parts which were strictly functional for the fulfillment of a productive operation. This aesthetic choice is indebted to an idealization of labor that had been in place since the early century of Fordist mechanization, whereby "the films, as much as the workers in the plant or the products they make, are but replaceable elements of an overall picture" (Wiatr 2002, 338; see also Grieveson 2018).

Rooted in the mass-assembly practices and in time and motion studies, any instructional film illustrating an industrial process aestheticizes labor insofar as "it represents the labor it depicts as approaching the magic standard of zero labor." As argued by Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky, this could result either in

dehumanization because the human being is assimilated (in representation) to the machine, the messiness and imperfection of human life

obscured in the treatment, or it engenders spectatorial pleasure in the face of painful labor that has made of the human being a beast of burden. (Skvirsky 2020, 120)

It must be said, though, that, as widespread as they became in Western Europe during this period, with enterprises sponsoring their own cycles of film lessons on the model of those imported from the US, these films largely predated the reorganization of industry that followed the end of the war. Other, and more recently produced films, told different stories and showed different aesthetics, whereby disciplined bodies did not function primarily instrumentally, and human labor was not merely compared to the machine's performance; on the contrary, the social dimension of work and its importance for (supra)national communities was emphasized. A "career choice film" such as *Prepararsi alla vita* (Prepare to live, dir. Giovanni Passante, IT, 1953), sponsored by the Ispettorato Generale per l'Impiego della Manodopera Disoccupata (General Inspectorate for Unemployed Workforce), could also be said to pursue an instructional purpose but only in a wider sense—leading the viewer through the path of professional training and job searching. The dissection of the worker's body in details of his hands and arms performing tasks is limited to the two sequences that show the protagonist undergoing a psycho-technical exam to discover his "natural inclination" and attending professional training courses to learn the craft of carpentry. Albeit being vaguely reminiscent of the traditional process and instructional film aesthetics, these images contextualize the working body within a precise setting, that of education and assistance services offered by the state and/or private enterprises. Moreover, they interlock it within a wider narrative, which extensively lingers on the unemployed man's frustrations about his condition, as well as his aspirations to marry and settle down.

Work is still idealized here, leaving any fatiguing or oppressive aspects invisible, but it would be hard to claim that such a representation tended toward dehumanization. On the contrary, the call for a "re-humanization process" foreseen by promoters of the human relations paradigm registered some significant changes in the aesthetics of industrial work and contributed to investing the human subject with a renewed discursive and representational relevance. The aesthetics of cinematic and photographic depictions of industrial work gradually moved away from the modernist-like fascination for machinery and for the epic struggle between men and matter and shifted toward more subdued tones, often embracing a neorealist style (Desole 2015, 118–22). The need to provide the image of an industry "at the service of men" quickly became a widely shared concern. For instance,



Figure 9.5. *Prepararsi alla vita* (Prepare to live, dir. Giovanni Passante, IT, 1953).

in the case of postwar Italy, criticism against the industrial films' aestheticization of the machine and pleas to emphasize the human dimension of labor came not only from critics of industrial capitalism, but also from Catholic-oriented and pro-Atlanticist policymakers, who were well aware that the representation of the human subject constituted a crucial bone of contention with their political opponents. A similar focus on the human dimension was also effectively in use in the Eastern European countries. In the manual for photographers *Fotografie v těžkém průmyslu* (Photography in heavy industry), Vladimír Hipman, a Czechoslovak expert on industrial photography, presents concrete examples of the right and wrong ways of depicting a worker. According to Hipman, wrong are those ways that emphasize the aesthetic qualities of the work, but make the essence of the work invisible or prevent the worker from being perceived at work or from recognizing his emotions (Hipman 1952). Although photographs presented in Hipman's book look similar at first glance—they all show workers with machines or tools—their composition, the chosen angle or the light create a fundamental difference. Hipman's approach could simply be interpreted as sharing principles of socialist realism, as he focuses on the man, the worker, his dedication to work and overall positive attitude. In the photographer's view the worker and the machine should work in harmony while not losing the human dimension.

Following this effort to present work organizations as "man-proof" environments, the representation of the workplace changed accordingly. Factories and workshops were no longer portrayed as places whereby men and machines perform a series of functional tasks, but also as spaces of

communal living under the benevolent guidance of the state and of industry themselves. Workfare institutions, such as vocational schools, industrial nurseries, and summer camps for employees' offspring, entered the repertoire of sponsored films as the newest, and probably most distinctive, representational subjects of post-World War II labor. *Infermeria di fabbrica* (Factory nursery, dir. Aristide Bosio, IT, 1950) constitutes an example where a business establishment is treated as an institution of social care. Produced by the typewriter and IT manufacturing company Olivetti, known for its progressive views and its communitarian conception of business organization (Gallino and De Sario 2004), the film warns against the dangers of mass-industrialized society, in which

work activities last for the whole year, except a few and largely inadequate rest periods, and require a constant, huge muscular effort, often within an unhealthy, dusty environment. Workers often keep an inhuman pace, repeating the same movements back and forth thousands of times for eight, nine, ten hours a day.

The voice-over's harsh criticism accompanies a fast-paced editing of humans and machines at work, drawing on modernist-tinged aesthetics of human-machine choreographies only to better illustrate the inhuman condition of industrial laborers. Even more surprisingly for a private enterprise-sponsored film, the risk of an injury during day-to-day operation is explicitly visualized in a scene showing a machine operator suffering a tragic accident due to a sudden explosion. These images, aiming to illustrate "a negative model, based upon the mere logics of productive efficientism," are soon counterbalanced with images of "a positive interaction between men, women and machines, whereby industrialization becomes a relief from fatigue instead of a form of alienation and exploitation" (Pierotti 2022, 60). Yet, albeit rhetorically opposed to the efficientist model, the representation of the industrial infirmary itself is informed by the principles of efficiency and rationality from mass-assembly practices. Healthcare services at the workplace are magnified as an "industrialized process" in all respects, with a team of highly specialized professionals, state-of-art medical equipment, a proper chain of operation, and a set of "medical surveillance" protocols. Workers' bodies in line in front of the infirmary get fragmented in details of (inactive) hands and arms and brought again under observation, this time not to look at the task they are performing but at their possible consequences. Being critical of the rhythms and methods of early mass-scale production, these representational stances reassess the social relevance of the workplace as

a space equipped to keep the individual safe from the harmful effects of the industrial modernity which it itself belongs to.

Films on occupational safety and accident prevention can be considered a novel, human-centered type of instructional film. Both in the Eastern and in the Western countries, private enterprises made extensive use of visual aids to show the working methods and procedures that had to be followed to avoid injuries. Alongside film screenings, leaflets, and billboards were displayed at the workplace, and painting or photo exhibitions were organized for employees. During one of these events, the Italian national oil and gas company Eni presented work safety as a psychological issue for the laborer and a financial one for the business manager, thus calling for an “alliance of technical and humanistic knowledge.” Visual communication campaigns were considered to be “the most suitable means to make a lasting and effective impression [...] leveraging on viewers’ receptiveness’ ‘line of least resistance’” (Guarino 1955, 7). Even if the instructional/educational aims in this context seem to respond to the policies of protecting workers more than to those of increasing productivity, the rhetoric of these media campaigns did not fail to warn against the damage that noncompliance with the rules could cause, not to the individual but to the entire plant and, by extension, to the whole industry. For example, the film produced by a local factory in Czechoslovak town Pilsen, *Dodržování pracovní kázně* (Maintaining labor discipline, CZ, 1950), is based on a situation where a pair of workers walk away from their machines and reminisce together about a Sunday walk in nature. During this conversation, the product is destroyed, and the rest of the film focuses its attention on a lengthy solution to the problem. The film appeals to the workers, suggesting that even a moment of inattention causes major losses in production. Similarly, in the film *Boj proti ztrátám V—zvýšenou bezpečností ke snížení úrazů* (Combating losses V—Increase safety to reduce injuries, dir. Ivo Toman, CZ, 1948) human injury and suffering, such as hair entangled in a machine, if not adequately protected, was interpreted not as individual pain but as a threat to the running of the national economy. As a part of the series *Combating Losses*, this film showed work accidents as causes of industrial malfunction. Films on work safety produced in Czechoslovakia at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s thus prove that what was dehumanizing in the socialist labor imagery was not the idealization of work itself, but the inadmissibility of errors at work, the denial of the faltering of the work process and the emphasis on the perfection of rational human performance. The slogan “Safe work is more efficient” used on one of the posters illustrates the aesthetics of idealization or spectacularization of work not primarily as dehumanizing and repressive, but as the rhetoric



of rationalization, effectivity, productivity, and overperformance, shared both in the Western and Eastern political arenas.

## Conclusion

Modern life is an endless “race against time.” And yet a lot of people waste many hours every day traveling on public transportation to go to work, waiting in line at the post office, sitting in a waiting room. While observing all these ordinary life scenes, an entrepreneur fantasizes about how smoothly life would run if only everyone lived closer to work, if mail employees and office secretaries were more efficient, if everyone learned to organize themselves. Despite not presenting itself explicitly as a work-motivated film, *Tempo perduto* (Lost time, dir. Vittorio Carpignano, IT, 1949) significantly ends with a scene set in a workshop, where a transmission belt just broke down. The worker who refuses to fix it is blamed for “uncooperative attitude.” The voice-over explains:

Whenever a small cog stops, all the factory’s activities stop. It may be only a few minutes, but if we were to multiply these few minutes by all the factories, plants, and workshops, then an entire year of work would be lost, with considerable losses for our national economy.

This ECA-sponsored film uses the persistence of the “industrial machinery” image as a metaphor for a well-functioning society. By the way it appeals directly to the worker’s accountability, however, it also shows that the same comparison is valid the other way round as well. Not only should society be working as efficiently as an industrial plant, but business organizations should also be managed as human societies. The acknowledgement of the social and human dimensions of labor in the aftermath of World War II made collective work a much more complex machine to operate. As “human resources” and “ordinary celebrities” on the shop floor, working men and women were required to adapt their thoughts, living habits, personal skills, and bodily capacities to the needs of the production system and of a renewed job market. In return, they needed to be properly instructed on how the system functioned, to be drawn toward its social and moral values, financially rewarded, and psychologically involved. In this sense, postwar labor policies opened a transitional phase for industrial economies. Borrowing Carol Wolkowitz’s explanation, during this phase the construction of the “‘useful’ body, one trained to act as a cog in the wheel, a ‘body

segment,' in Foucault's terms," was gradually to be extended to "target the 'whole person'" (Wolkowitz 2006, 55).

The medium of film also adapted itself to suit this transition. Postwar transformations in the relationship between cinema, work, industry, and society highlighted the role of managing human resources and, as such, partially redefined the role of the work-motivated film. Cinema continued to serve as a medium to reproduce efficiency, but in the specific conditions of the postwar reconstruction it could, on the one hand, serve as an instrument of continuity (as we have seen in the example of learning the methods of the exiled Germans in Czechoslovakia through film) and, on the other hand, serve as a tool to promote and operate profound changes (such as mobility across national borders or professional re-training). The constant rhetorical insistence underlying collective participation was tuned to the future as much as it was conditioned by the past. Though postwar policies were building the foundations of new modernities on the ruins of the conflict, in many ways they benefited from society's wartime experience, recognizing its positive aspects for postwar reconstruction. In this sense, labor policies after 1945 relied on the assumption that the wartime experience of the strong regulation of life and work mobilization would predetermine the population to work toward their future well-being under the direction of the state (or other institutions) in the new conditions.

Employment policies made use of film and media in campaigns aimed at creating the role model of a "new person" accepting these new arrangements as a necessity. Such a governmental agenda made the aestheticization of work a politically unspecific strategy, shared by both socialist and capitalist economies. In both areas of Europe, the quest for the most effective work methods, for an improved living standard and for a safer condition, outline, in retrospect, the idealized model of an efficient, optimistic, invulnerable worker.

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## 10. Choreographies of Public Space

Non-fiction Film and Performances of Citizenship in  
Postwar Europe

*Johannes Praetorius-Rhein and Andrea Průchová Hružová*

### Abstract

This chapter revolves around a critical analysis of the body in documentary films from postwar Europe. Films are not seen merely as images of idealized or real bodies, but as a formative element for the public performance of citizenship. It explores constellations between the staging of collective bodies as well as the dynamics of individual figures and the cinematographic representation of public space. Drawing on the philosophical concept of “rhythmanalysis” developed by Henri Lefebvre, such constellations are conceived as choreographies. The analyses seeks to transcend the binary logic of West versus East. It points at the importance and the use of public bodies as cinematographic political figures in both, the liberal democratic system and the communist regime.

**Keywords:** public space, bodies, rhythm, movement, opposition, Cold War

*Old films show that our way of walking has altered over the course of our century:  
once jauntier, a rhythm that cannot be explained by the capturing of images.*

—Henri Lefebvre 2004 [1992], 38

### Introduction

Can postwar documentaries show us how people really moved through, used, and occupied public space in the era of reconstruction? Many of these films seem too theatrical for such realistic fallacy. But if we believe we have seen through this: What effect did these non-fictional stagings have on citizens

who were supposed to recognize themselves on the screen? How did they walk home from the cinema?

This chapter argues that non-fiction films are more than visual representations and that they can be used to analyze dominant concepts of public space and the strategies of implementing and establishing them. The potential of non-fiction film as a source for a deeper understanding of the reconstruction and postwar development of public space may appear limited. Documentary films from this era are often of a rather photographic, more static character, as they usually do not investigate either extra-filmic or cinematic spatiality. The destruction of specific buildings or entire cities and the process of their reconstruction are mostly illustrated with a few images, often iconic views or generically styled shots, while the moving image and the mobile camera are rarely used to create a spatial experience for the audience. Therefore, films sometimes serve as additional, but not primary source material, while the use of other types of visual media such as photos, maps, and blueprints is a well-established practice. But if those rather conceptual representations usually conceive public places as empty structures, the unique value of documentary films is that they can provide us with images of spaces that are populated, occupied, and filled with action.

Drawing on the writings of Henri Lefebvre, we argue that this cinematic action is not only taking place *in* public space but that it can be understood as a part of its production (and so of its reconstruction). More particularly, we look at certain types, ways, and rhythms of moving bodies that are being documented, enacted, and instructed through non-fiction films. In other words, we do not necessarily understand these moving images as less conceptual than blueprints and maps, but as tools to develop and implement certain normative conceptions of bodies in public space. In this chapter, we aim to explore patterns and models of movement that not only happen *inside* public spaces and *outside* of the film camera, but that can be understood as a link between the images produced by the camera and social practices producing public space. These constellations of spaces, bodies, and representations are what we call choreographies of public space.

In postwar Europe such choreographies had to be developed because of the repopulation of newly constructed and designed urban landscapes, and they rose in relevance with the binary logics of the confrontation of two political blocs: liberal capitalism and state socialism. Their competition included opposing concepts of public space and contrasting them makes the corresponding choreographies increasingly visible. Therefore, we explore these issues based on a corpus of films from across Europe which were produced and funded within the ideological horizon of the emerging Cold War.

## Mass Choreographies after Fascism

If we think of public choreographies in the ideological settings of postwar Europe, the images of parades and mass events of Stalinist culture are probably the first ones to come to mind. They can be found throughout the decade, circulating in many documentary films as well as newsreels from the Eastern Bloc. A particularly interesting example is the Czechoslovak film *Na Spartakiádu nezapomeneme* (We will not forget the Spartakiade, dir. Jindřich Ferenc, CZ, 1955).<sup>1</sup> It documents the gymnastic mass choreographies of the first Spartakiade in Prague, which was held in 1955 and was a substitute for the original tradition of collective sport events organized under the umbrella of the national Sokol platform. The popular movement, whose activities were banned both under the Nazis and then also during state socialism, was replaced by the internationalist Soviet label of the Spartakiade, originally a proletarian counter-event to the bourgeois Olympia. The spectacular wide shots of hundreds if not thousands of bodies who are dressed uniformly and move in almost perfect synchronicity seem to negate any sense of individuality. In the mass of these gymnasts there is no room for any expressive or skillful artistry, but only alignment. We can immediately understand these images as a typical product of authoritarian regimes. As Susan Sontag has noted in her seminal essay about the works of Leni Riefenstahl, such mass choreographies are a common element in both fascist and communist art:

The rendering of movement in grandiose and rigid patterns is another element in common, for such choreography rehearses the very unity of the polity. The masses are made to take form, be design. Hence mass athletic demonstrations, a choreographed display of bodies, are a valued activity in all totalitarian countries; and the art of the gymnast, so popular now in Eastern Europe, also evokes recurrent features of fascist aesthetics; the holding in or confining of force; military precision. (Sontag 1980, 91–92)

1 Several other films dedicated to this important public event were released in the same year of 1955. Specifically, *Spartakiádě zdar!* (Greetings to Spartakiade, dir. Štefan Ondrkal and Milan Černák), *Pracovní zálohy nastupují* (Reserve workers on stage, dir. Emanuel Kaněra), *Jedeme na Spartakiádu* (We are going to Spartakiade, dir. Miroslav Lang), *Nácvik na školách* (Practicing at school, dir. Jiří Mrázek), *První krajská Spartakiáda v Brně* (First regional Spartakiade in Brno, dir. Miroslav Bárta), *Spartakiáda* (Spartakiade, dir. Vladimír Kabelík), and the stereofilm released specifically for the first stereoscopic cinema in Prague, *Plastické ukázky z první celostátní Spartakiády* (Plastic excerpts from the First National Spartakiade, dir. Pavel Blumenfeld).



But on a closer look, we can identify crucial differences in how these choreographies were brought on screen. For one thing, in the case of *Na Spartakiádu nezapomeneme*, the camera perspectives are not centered around a “Super-Spectator” (ibid., 87) as is typical for Riefenstahl’s films: Instead of recreating a leader’s quasi-divine gaze that rests on everything, the camera here shows in reverse shots small groups and individual spectators in the stands, who are taking an active interest in the event. It appears as if some gymnasts could come on the stand to watch the others perform while the men and women in the audience might join the athletes. High angle shots capture the performance from different perspectives within the stadium and only occasionally does the visual axes fit into the symmetry of the choreography. Shot from the corner, the gymnasts in the stadium look more like a crop field evenly blown by the wind than a military formation. Even the performing soldiers who are holding guns in their hands make sweeping gestures that leave an almost peaceful impression, although the Spartakiade was held to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the liberation by the Red Army.

Sontag’s point about the visual parallels in authoritarian choreographies, however, was nothing new; in the early 1950s, this was an essential part of Western Cold War rhetoric. A telling example for this is one of the so-called Marshall Plan films, *Whitsun Holiday* (dir. Peter Baylis, GB, 1954).<sup>2</sup> The film tells how differently the holiday weekend is spent in East Berlin and Western Europe. While the long weekend means time for leisure and recreation in the West, East Berlin appears filled with uniformed bodies fanatically applauding the strident speeches of their leaders. The footage from Berlin was taken from the East German newsreel *Der Augenzeuge*, no. 22/1950, where it had originally been used in a report on the “National Meeting of Youth” (“Deutschlandtreffen der Jugend”) in 1950. A comparison reveals how carefully the images for the British documentary were selected. Only the few shots where the applause is almost synchronous were chosen, so that the clapping hands sound like boots marching in step. And when everyone raises their fists for the greeting of the “Red Front,” the image even seems slightly blurred, as if it is supposed to look more like the Nazi salute. With this selective use of footage, the British film makes one point very clear. Even if the German communists march under slogans of world peace and international solidarity, their bodies still perform the Nazi choreography.

2 The film can be found in the ViCTOR-E collection on the European Film Gateway and be watched on the homepage of Zeughauskino Berlin, <https://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/detail/Whitsun%20Holiday/dhm::9e45f599bb6f12b6d4a4c6cfbecbb8d7>.

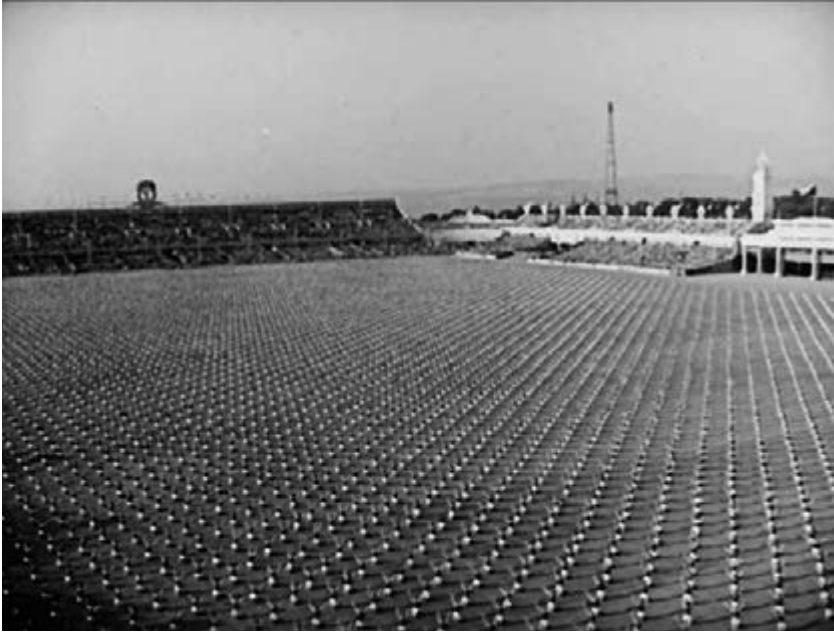


Figure 10.1. The choreographed mass does not have to look military; it may also look like a crop field blown by the wind. Still from *Spartakiáda* (dir. Martin Frič, CZ, 1955). Courtesy of Národní filmový archiv, Prague.

At the end, a fictitious East German narrator talks about spreading the message of peace to Western Europe while a torchlight parade marches into the night, turning the words into a threat of war. Such visual production of paradoxes, that are used to characterize the “other side,” is a typical strategy of Cold War films.

While, from the perspective of postwar liberalism, all civic parades, marches, and uniforms were suspect as an indicator of totalitarianism, this was quite different for those who positioned themselves within the tradition of the workers movement. From this perspective, the public presentation of symbols and rituals of formerly banned and persecuted mass organizations served as a demonstration of the victory over fascism. A good example is *Togliatti è ritornato* (Togliatti has returned, dir. Basilio Franchina and Carlo Lizzani, IT, 1949),<sup>3</sup> a documentary commissioned by the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI, Italian Communist Party). It shows the first public reappearance of the communist leader Palmiro Togliatti

3 The film can be found and watched on the European Film Gateway: <https://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/detail/Togliatti%20%C3%A8%20ritornato/aamod::3ff2ef974c8e77e54bdf4b7ed7b3406b>.



Figure 10.2. Reclaiming the spaces and bodies shaped by fascism. Still from *Togliatti è ritornato* (Togliatti has returned, dir. Basilio Franchina and Carlo Lizzani, IT, 1949). Courtesy of Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (AAMOD), Rome.

after he had survived an attempted assassination by a young fascist in 1948. It also documents a collective appropriation of a public space specifically shaped by fascism, as the PCI had organized a huge event in the Foro Italico, a stadium built by Mussolini for the sports events by the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB), the fascist youth organization. The audience that had now come to this place for Togliatti can be seen climbing on the monumental statues. These remainders of the fascist body cult now serve as poles for the PCI's red flags. However, the film is far from showing the communists as an amorphous crowd; they appear as a well-structured mass organization. The event is preceded by a long procession through Rome in which party members from all over Italy participate; some of them uniformed and most of them holding flags and banners. They are joining the march to the Foro Italico where, at the end of the film, the audience melts into a flow of waving arms and flags. Here, the mass event and its choreography appear as a confident presentation of an undefeated and united anti-fascist movement.

So, on the one hand, images of mass events and their choreographies were used as visual evidence of the obvious parallels between authoritarian regimes, while similar or even the same images could be used in other films to demonstrate the opposite, the victory over fascism.

## Truth Lies within Bodies

The constructed opposition between Western and Eastern Europe developed in the above-mentioned *Whitsun Holiday* is further elaborated by a fictional voice-over dialogue between a communist and Western narrator. According to the communist narrator, East Berliners are obliged to participate in a parade where “all conform in the glorious harmony of our holiday”; in contrast, the Western narrator tells us, the citizens of Western Europe spend their day off with “good things” which are “very much a matter of personal choice and national taste.” He acknowledges the chaotic and disorganized look of Western European streets as “everyone has planned his own holiday,” which is carefully portrayed through the diversity of possible choices and lifestyles. For instance, different forms of travel, a variety of delicacies and local specialties, and different games to play. But then the narrator explicitly states what the montage has already suggested anyway, that there is a “kind of unity in the disunity of it all.” Thus, even in the liberal states of the West, political unity is revealed by looking at bodies and their movements through public space. Even though Western citizens pursue their individual plans and go in different directions, they ultimately come together in a harmonious flow as the commentary suggests: during the holiday Europe is moving “its people by the millions, sending them to the mountains and the rivers, to the parks and the fairgrounds, leaving the streets of the cities half empty.” The citizens of East Berlin, on the other hand, are stuck in the city, crammed into the streets, and marching in step.

A similar juxtaposition is found in the West German short documentary *Zwei Städte* (Two cities, dir. Stuart Schulberg, FRG, 1950),<sup>4</sup> which was produced by Zeit im Film, a company founded by the American administration headed by Stuart Schulberg, who also directed this film. The documentary compares East German Dresden with southwest German Stuttgart and employs originally shot footage from the streets of both cities. As the film aims to reveal the truth behind the Eastern propaganda, we see a long traveling shot showing the center of Dresden as a field of rubble, followed by a montage of communist posters hanging on streets, calling on workers and activists to make the extra efforts. In contrast, Stuttgart is shown as a modern and developing city, where the newsstand stocks dozens of different newspapers and the shops display an abundance of goods and luxuries. Once again, the important difference between East and West is demonstrated in

4 The film can be watched on the homepage of the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: <https://www.bpb.de/mediathek/video/206883/zwei-staedte/>.

the way people move through the streets. Citizens of Dresden are in fact hardly moving. They are standing and waiting—for public transport that does not arrive or in endlessly long queues in front of empty grocery shops. Meanwhile, the vibrant streets of Stuttgart are full of cars and trams. Here, passers-by move purposefully as if they have somewhere to go, and yet their eyes always get caught by something—be it a headline in the newspaper, a new kitchen appliance, or the latest fashion trend. Citizens of Stuttgart know what they want and they know how to look for it, while the people in Dresden can only wait with no destination to reach.

Both anti-communist films use footage of public places in East German cities to disprove the claims of the Eastern propaganda about social and economic progress. In their representation of public space, the proclaimed progress is debunked as stagnation and repression. Images of still bodies and the constant repetition of fascist choreographies illustrate this representational strategy quite literally. As it operates in the binary logics of the emerging Cold War, it is further underlined by the depiction of completely differently moving bodies in Western cities. Public space in Western societies is not only defined by the absence of marches and choreographed mass events, but also by placing a certain type of moving body in them—the determined yet relaxed consumer.

Eastern productions often used a similar visual rhetoric to question and to investigate the political claims coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain. The DEFA newsreel *Der Augenzeuge* regularly presented its own footage in which the “truth” about life in West German cities was “revealed.” For example, the segment called *Alltagsbilder aus Westdeutschland* (Everyday pictures from West Germany, *Der Augenzeuge*, no. 24/1950) was shot in the big cities in Rhineland and the Ruhr area.<sup>5</sup> There, the camera had captured bodies usually kept out of sight in West German productions like beggars, often those disabled by war and incapable to walk, who ask for money on shopping streets. In the feature length documentary *Freundschaft siegt!* (Friendship wins!, dir. Joris Ivens and Ivan Pyryev, GDR-RU, 1951), a short sequence from West Berlin puts such invalid bodies into brutal contrast to Coca-Cola slogans read out loud in the voice-over. In a similar way to how Dresden is defined as the city of propaganda posters in *Zwei Städte*, Western cities are shown as cities of advertisement billboards in Eastern films—in both cases, they are then put in harsh contrast to the immobile bodies of the poor and old.

5 The segment can be watched as part of the online exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*: <https://www.frames-reconstruction.eu/story/Society-Everyday-Life;v=Spaces-of-Democracy--Video-frame;i=West-Germany---Everyday-Scenes;d=t>.

In *Freundschaft siegt!* the voice-over states that in the western part of Berlin there is “no place for the great human ideals that inspire peace-loving youth.” West Berlin thereby serves as a contrast to the main topic of this feature-length color documentary: The World Festival of Youth, taking place in East Berlin, where young people from all around the world come together to celebrate international solidarity in an endless succession of marches, performances, and speeches. Here, such mass events do not illustrate the totalitarian nature of communism, but it is the other way around. The fact that political marches and demonstrations have no place in Western cities is supposed to prove to the Eastern audience that fascist oppression is perpetuated by “American imperialism” and its allies.

In summary, documentary films from both ideological perspectives have drawn heavily on images of public space as representations of two competing social, political, and economic systems. They were used to present an idealized version of their own society and to reveal the “truth” about the opposing other, therefore employing cinema as a powerful producer of cultural auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes through which two different, yet dialectically linked regimes of visibility were established and reproduced. To focus on the representation of public space seemed to be expedient as it always operates through two façades. Public space is a stage on which a polity represents and recognizes itself and yet, at the same time, it is an uncontrolled space in which many realities that do not fit into the set representational regime emerge and are met with ideological interpellations and disciplinary imperatives.

## Production of Space

Public space is often approached either as a collectively known, identity-creating architectural surface, or/at the same time as an empty infrastructure whose potentials can be used and realized by sovereign and equal subjects, as Habermas’s famous articulation of the public sphere suggests (Habermas 1989 [1962]). Thus, public space seems to be heavily affected by two contradictory, yet intertwined illusions that prevent us from recognizing it as a social construction. The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre conceptualizes them as the *illusion of transparency* and the *illusion of opacity*. The illusion of transparency makes space appear “as innocent, as free of traps or secret places” (Lefebvre 1991 [1974], 28). It is a quasi-idealistic exaggeration of subjectivity when space appears “as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein” (ibid., 27). On the other hand, the illusion of opacity—or

the realistic illusion—corresponds to a mechanistic objectivism of “natural simplicity” (ibid., 29) and sees space only in terms of “substantiality, naturalness and spatial opacity” (ibid., 30).

In his seminal book *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]), Lefebvre argues that space rather must be understood as a multilayered platform through and on which the hegemonic powers operate. In this sense, it is “produced,” however it does not reach the stage of a final, fixed product. It has an active character of being constantly negotiated within the circle of continuous production and reproduction of social power relations. Lefebvre therefore suggests analyzing the process of space production along three basic dimensions: the “perceived–conceived–lived triad” (ibid., 40). Social space is produced through its visual and physical perception in everyday life (*the perceived*), through rational and mental conceptions (*the conceived*), and through its emotional use and experience in the sense that it is “lived through its associated images and symbols” (ibid., 39). Corresponding to this, Lefebvre makes a distinction between the “spatial practice” of daily routines connecting and separating specific spaces such as public and private or work and leisure, “representations of space” such as maps, models, or signs that rationally and disciplinary organize space, and “spaces of representation” that combine symbolic inscriptions into the space and its various ways of use in which the intersection of rule and subversion naturally occurs: “This is the dominated [...] space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (ibid., 39).

Along with Lefebvre, we want to emphasize the interconnectivity of these three levels. It would significantly reduce its interpretative potential if the triad were to be employed as a simple tool of classification that would make us look at specific films solely as “representations of space,” to understand organized political mass events only as “spaces of representation,” and to treat moving bodies on streets simply as examples of “spatial practice.” Rather, we want to understand how non-fiction film serves as an instrument for observation, instruction, and aestheticization of the bodies of citizens and their visible movements, and thereby for the social production of public space. Therefore, we suggest the concept of choreography as a framework in which all three dimensions of physically experienced routines, conceptual organization, and symbolic representation can be connected and examined.

## Choreographies of Public Space

In Lefebvre’s triad, the moving body and its physical experience would be typically understood in terms of the nonreflective, self-unaware spatial

practice of daily routines. In his writings from the late 1960s, this corporal materiality of the everyday life—as opposed to mental consciousness—has been linked to rhythmicity (Lefebvre 1971, 19). In his late writings, Lefebvre returned to rhythm as a new analytical paradigm—that is focused on the body, its experience and organization. He describes the individual body as “a bundle of rhythms” (ibid., 20), but also understands entire societies as “composed of [...] the rhythms of which living beings, social bodies, local groups are made up” (ibid., 42).

If Lefebvre puts rhythmically organized bodies so profoundly into the center of his late social analysis, he can hardly limit the analysis to the reflection of nonreflexive everyday life. Indeed, the author also mentions the scheduled rhythms of a disciplinary organization: “Dressage therefore has its rhythms; breeders know them. Learning has its own, which educators know. Training also has its rhythms, which accompany those of dancers and *tamers* [dresseurs]” (ibid., 40). In the context of urban spaces, Lefebvre also introduces the concept of a public and thereby representational rhythm: “Rhythms ‘of the other’ would be the rhythms of activities turned outward, towards the public. One could also call them ‘the rhythms of representation’; more restrained, more formalized” (ibid., 95).

This means that all three levels of the analytical triad return within rhythmanalysis. Rhythms of everyday life, of dressage, and of representation organize the perception, conception and living experience of individual and social bodies and their movements in time and space. But if the triad originally referred to different aspects of (social) space, what would integrate this triad of rhythms? In our understanding, the term “choreography” is a suitable concept here, as it corresponds with the basic shift of rhythmanalysis towards corporality and rhythm, but it emphasizes the conceptualized, formalized, and trained organization as well as the representational and performative capacities of moving bodies, specifically in public space. In other words, we suggest a conceptual integration of Lefebvre’s triad to analyze the production of space while focusing on the rhythmical organization of the moving body. By showing how non-fiction films have been used to develop, implement, and make visible such choreographies, it becomes clear that the films not only depicted public space, but also were part of its production.

In contrast to other authors, we do not initially look for subversive potential in choreography. The theatrical practice of walking (Marschall 2009) as well as Lefebvre’s own project of rhythmanalysis as a form of “urban poetics” (Revol 2020) have been discussed as subversive strategies to bodily reappropriate public space. Similarly, recent works in film studies have



stressed subversive aesthetics of urban walking in the history of feature film (Özgen 2022; Tucker 2020). Following Lefebvre, many authors understand the production of social space as being dominated by an abstract logic of the visual and a “decorporealization of space” (Gregory 1994, 382–95). In contrast to that, we analyze non-fiction film as a tool to take hold of bodies, to shape them, and to arrange them in space.

## Postwar Rhythms

Rhythms are repetitive, but can be changed, disturbed, and get out of sync. Gradual or rupturing social changes and political events have an impact on them. As Lefebvre notes, social “crises always have origins in and effects on rhythms” (ibid., 44). The Second World War undoubtedly represented a rupture so violent that it was not only followed by “rhythmic changes,” but it acted as a call for an extensive social renewal in Europe and outside it.

The Marshall Plan film *Whitsun Holiday* is in fact a film about two very different ways to spend the time of the long weekend. The difference between East and West is in fact primarily one of two different systems to manage the symbolic time of a holiday. And surprisingly, the Christian background of Whitsun does not play an important role here. Communism is not portrayed as anti-religious and church is only mentioned briefly, as one of the many options for how West Europeans can spend their holiday. But most people in Western Europe don't seem to celebrate Whitsun at all, they simply enjoy the long weekend—which might or might not include a church visit. The ideological contrast between the democratic West and totalitarian communism, which the film attempts to tell, is not built on the contrast between Christian values and materialism, but on leisure (West) vs ritual (East). Obviously, the “National Meeting of Youth” in East Berlin is a purely secular event; nevertheless, the holiday here is not only an extended “normal weekend,” but a time that can be filled with symbolical value and meaning transcending everyday life (and every weekend recreational time). A similar contrast can be found in *Freundschaft siegt!* albeit from an opposite political perspective. While the citizens of West Berlin sit around in coffee houses and do not represent anything more than the consumers of capitalist everyday reality, the “Youth of the World” gather in East Berlin to create a visual and physical experience of world peace and solidarity. It is a special day and it is seized for a special event.

The central importance of mass events in communist countries is tied to a specific temporal order that is inscribed into public space. Public

spaces are not only (re)built for everyday traffic, but are optically and physically geared to public holidays, so that public space is also a socially representative infrastructure, not just a logistical one. In the first post-WWII decade, of course, one of the most important holidays was scheduled for May 1st. Every year, the May Day parades were covered by documentaries and newsreels in many cities. A good example is provided by the colorful film *Radostné dny* (Happy days, dir. Miroslav Hubáček and Jiří Weiss, CZ, 1951), depicting the May Day parade in Prague in 1951. The first five minutes show farms, factories, mines, and construction sites spread across the country. Workers are shown in various places against the backdrop of beautiful nature or impressive technology and seem to be happy and motivated in their everyday life. But while the film can capture this idyllic panorama in a montage, the fact that all days are “happy days” all over the country cannot become part of the workers’ everyday experience. Therefore, the enthusiasm about living and working in the communist society is further enhanced by celebrating the one explicitly happy day, May Day. Only on that day, as the film demonstrates, when the streets and avenues of Prague become the stage for collective celebration, can the visual and physical experience of the Czechoslovak proletariat working as “one man” be produced. The film example also shows that the temporal structure of the communist public space is not only built around holidays, but also centered around production.

According to the binary logics of political opposition, the public space in Western films is dominated by everyday consumption. This becomes particularly evident in the above-mentioned film *Zwei Städte*, where the entire urban space of the Western city is defined by looking in and through shop windows and by displaying and inspecting goods and products of various kinds. While we can assume that many people who are moving quickly and determinedly through the center of Stuttgart are on their way to work or returning home from it, this fact appears to have no relevance—and therefore no space—in the public sphere. Even the newsstand, manifesting a plural political discourse in contrast to the monologic propaganda posters in Dresden, is shown as a marketplace, where different opinions are on display and compete for the attention of potential buyers moving through the street.

This fast and uncoordinated rhythm of consumption in the streets of Stuttgart stands in sharp contrast to the rhythm of moving bodies in the films produced in state socialism. These often draw on visual parallels and continuities between coordinated and specialized work processes and mass choreographies. The Czechoslovak film *Jeden, tisíc, milion* (One, thousand,



Figure 10.3. Work as dance, dance as work. Still from *Jeden, tisíc, milion* (One, thousand, million, dir. Miroslav Hubáček, CZ, 1948). Courtesy of Národní filmový archiv, Prague.

million, dir. Miroslav Hubáček, CZ, 1948) proves this well.<sup>6</sup> The documentary depicts a story of step-by-step organization of the first and last Sokol event held after the communist takeover in 1948.<sup>7</sup> It aestheticizes the bodies and movements of workers, who are building the Strahov Stadium in Prague; the well-trained, well-organized, and smooth-working process anticipates the scenes of gymnasts who later perform in the newly rebuilt stadium.

Of course, films promoting liberal capitalism could also not simply ignore the processes of production, certainly not at a time when industrialized production held the promises for abundances of consumer culture. However, the separation of production in private spaces and consumption in public spaces is especially clear in films showing their connection. In *Village without Words* (dir. David Kurland, IT, 1950),<sup>8</sup> we see the deserted streets of an Italian town, which almost appears as a ghost town. There are newspapers rolling through streets just like tumble weed and the shop windows are as

6 The segment can be watched as part of the online exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*: <https://www.frames-reconstruction.eu/story/Society-Everyday-Life?v=Organised-Culture-New-and-Old-Traditions-and-Festivities>.

7 The civic sport organization Sokol was founded in 1860s to promote and support the physical and moral strength of Czechs and Slovaks. Its existence has always been linked with promoting and fighting the idea of the independence and freedom of the Czechoslovak national identity. The organization was banned under the Nazis and during the era of state socialism. It has now operated since 1990.

8 The film can be found in the ViCTOR-E collection on the European Film Gateway and watched on the homepage of Zeughauskino Berlin: <https://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/detail/Village%20Without%20Words/dhm::ad88cc59de8721bb1ce4294d1ceeb516>.

empty as the streets themselves. The camera finds an explanation for this situation behind the closed factory gates; the factory is not producing, all the machines are standing still. But then an American ship arrives, bringing resources and machines as part of the European Recovery Program. But the fruits of the Marshall Plan do not go to stores immediately. First, they go through the factory. When the machines start working again, suddenly the streets are full of life. Even though the film shows production and public life in a cyclical relationship, it emphasizes the spatial and temporal difference producing the gendered rhythm of everyday postwar life. First, the men have to pass the factory gate and insert their time cards into the stamp machine, then the merry-go-round starts turning and children can play again while women find plenty of goods in stores.

Based on the analysis, we can sum up that the films produced under liberal capitalism often make the economy appear as a quasi-natural cycle. This representation is based on a separation between a public sphere of consumption, recreation, and leisure and the efficient, but privatized realm of production. In contrast, films produced in the ideological framework of communism frequently promote various mass events as platforms on which the proletariat, usually existing only as a separated workforce on individual sites of production, can appear and consciously experience itself as one public body.

### Physical Exercises for Ideal Citizens

How does non-fiction film operate within these strategies of organizing and communicating social order? As mentioned before, we do not want to employ a separation between moving bodies as an extra-filmic reality and their film representation. Instead, we suggest the concept of choreography that emphasizes both the performative nature of moving bodies in public space as well as the active role of film as a tool for implementing certain choreographies.

The most explicit example demonstrating this idea can be found in *Jeden, tisíc, milion*. We not only see visual parallels between construction work and gymnastic choreographies, but the film also emphasizes how much work is required to learn these choreographies. In the first sequence, we see men from different parts of the city and various social backgrounds leaving their homes. When they arrive at the Sokol meeting, they do not immediately start exercising. First, they gather in front of a screen to watch an instructional film, then they repeat the choreography they have just

seen. The harmony of the Sokol choreographies, which we later observe in the stadium, is not naturalized but shown as a result of hard work. And the instructional film shown within the film plays the role of a modern and effective tool for achieving such a social and rhythmic harmony.

Films from Czechoslovakia and East Germany often show, sometimes in detail, the preparation for parades and mass events. In *1. Mai 1946* (May 1, 1946, dir. Hans Klering, East Germany, 1946), the first five of its total fifteen minutes are dedicated to presenting various kinds of arrangements necessary for the big event: discussions among comrades, planning the route through the city, building stands for audiences, party officials, and speakers, recording speeches and rehearsing performances, calling the masses to the rally, bringing all the workers to Berlin, and feeding them. The May Day parade is not represented as a naturally given appearance of the proletariat but shown as a conscious decision demanding commitment by the communist organization. And again, we find a direct reference to the film medium here. The camera captures a camera operator filming the moment when the parade arrives at a square for the final speeches. It is an interesting moment of transition, when the masses stop being the protagonists of the parade marching through the streets and become part of the audience listening to speeches.

Such moments of transition, when the mass as audience is turned into the mass as performer and back again, can be found in many films in this category. Even in films like *Freundschaft siegt!* or *Na Spartakiádu nezapomeneme*, which show mass performances taking place in clearly defined spaces such as squares or stadiums, the films always make sure to show the streets leading there, making these stages permeable within the city. The wide spaces are kept clear for the parades, yet are not definitely separated from urban space. On holidays, however, both are transformed into a public stage for a consciously orchestrated collective performance. As the historian Rosalinde Sartori writes using an observation from the Russian-American journalist Eugene Lyons,

The perfectly planned and organized parades were the model image for a perfectly functioning production process, for the victory of mechanization. Yet, they were unique in still another aspect: there were no spectators, no audience: "It is the world's most unique parade—the one parade in which [...] there are no spectators. Everybody marches. A parade for parades sake, without audience."<sup>9</sup> (Sartori 1990, 63)

9 The quote comes from Eugene Lyons's book *Modern Moscow* (1935); Sartori continues: "Was the elimination of spectators what avant-garde stage directors had once advocated as the future

If these mass events were precisely about a conscious production of a collective image, the camera would not have to be hidden. The film apparatus was shown to mark a self-aware process of representation and, in fact, as an essential part of it.

This was different in capitalist countries, where the choreographies of public space did not take the form of a collective, self-conscious, and festive act of representation. Here, the mobilization of bodies in political parades was seen as an indicator of oppression. In fact, it was important to separate the political process from the physical presence in public space, as many films demonstrate. This becomes very clear in the reorientation film *Der leere Stuhl* (The empty chair, dir. Johannes Lüdke, FRG, 1951),<sup>10</sup> which generally promotes political involvement and participation, however not through mobilization, but precisely through an immobilization of the body. Namely, the film refers to the “empty chairs” in all the institutions and committees, waiting for interested citizens to take a seat and thereby to take part in the political process. The passive position in which the audience found itself in the cinema seats was not constructed as an opposition to political participation (as it often was the case since the 1960s). Rather and in contrast to the mobilized bodies of authoritarian parades, physical immobility forms a condition for gathering critically observing citizens. But if postwar liberalism sought to confine the political to institutions, it paradoxically also had to promote an everyday culture that would substantiate the values of liberal democracy. If Western public space was meant to be kept free of political and ideological orchestration, it was to be populated by bodies moving freely yet harmoniously. In this choreography of public space, the camera appeared as a mostly invisible instrument to observe individual bodies. Its purpose was to make the political body appear by revealing the organic harmony behind the routines of everyday life—to find a “kind of unity in the disunity of it all,” as it is put in *Whitsun Holiday*. But even if these films were not explicitly instruments of collective representation, mobilization, and exercise and would bind their audiences rather through the “silver chains of mimesis” (Grieveson 2018), they specifically targeted the body and its movement in public space.

Socialist way of celebrating, where the boundaries which separate work from play, life from the arts, and the spectator from the artist will disappear, or was it rather a centrally imposed unity that left no more room for deviant ideas or self-initiative? Soviet socio-political history proves the latter” (Sartori 1990, 63).

<sup>10</sup> The film can be watched on the homepage of the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: <https://www.bpb.de/mediathek/video/206888/der-leere-stuhl/>.

A striking example of this is *Jedermann ein Fußgänger* (Everyone a pedestrian, dir. Willy Prager, FRG, 1950),<sup>11</sup> which starts as a typical traffic education film by observing careless behavior and pointing out its risks for accidents in modern urban traffic. But before the film demonstrates the correct conduct, it takes a political detour. After some (fictitious) citizens express their feeling that as individual pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists they cannot change anything about the risks of modern traffic and delegate the problem to the police, the film makes very clear that this attitude belongs to the past. Expecting government guidance in everyday life leads to authoritarianism, while democracy demands people to take their own responsibility. “No freedom without participation,” as the narrator states. Accordingly, the freedom of the citizens of Western Europe is manifested not only in the manifold lifestyles or ways and directions of movement, but also in a certain form of behavior. The shared public space might not be a space for political demonstrations, but it most certainly is a space in which one is to demonstrate democratic conduct.

A similar variation of an established genre can be found in *Erben der Vergangenheit* (Heirs of the past, dir. Ernst Niederreither, FRG, 1949), which promotes the reintegration of war invalids. Since World War I, films have been used to illustrate that men who have lost an arm or a leg in war can reach their full bodily capacity through modern medicine and persistent training. Typically, these films focus on the invalids who are again becoming productive members of society while employing the visual spectacle of the injured body and its almost artistic overcoming. *Erben der Vergangenheit* departs from this convention as it does not pay attention to the quasi-mechanical reintegration of the bodies into efficient work processes, but first focuses on relearning civilian leisure activities. The men relearn to ski, swim, and dance, in addition to simply walking. This therapy acts as a reversal of military drill. Their bodies must unlearn military toughness and be transformed back into calm and relaxed civilians. Here, the injured bodies of veterans appear not only as a pitiable curiosity, but as a metaphor for the trauma of society at large.

In fact, there is a film in which the call to train off the physically internalized military toughness is addressed directly to the cinema audience. *Marschieren, Marschieren* (Marching, marching, dir. Gerhard Born, FRG, 1949) uses archival footage to ridicule marching and especially the Prussian goose step. It retells the history of the two world wars through the march

11 The film can be found in the ViCTOR-E collection on the European Film Gateway: <https://www.filmportal.de/en/node/38433/video/1785553>.



Figure 10.4. A kind of unity in the disunity of it all. Still from *Jedermann ein Fußgänger* (Everyone a pedestrian, dir. Willy Prager, FRG, 1950). Courtesy of the Embassy of the United States of America, Berlin.

as a kind of perversion of German hiking. The film closes with the direct call addressed to the audience, encouraging viewers to leave the cinema in a deliberately relaxed manner, not to march, but to stroll home and pass the shop windows. Once more, walking calmly and prudently through the streets appears as a core competence of the democratic citizen. The ironic lightness of the film is as far away as possible from the pathos of communist mass events. But here, too, the audience is invited to participate in a choreography that uses public space for a performance of democratic community.

## Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, two distinct and competing models of public space developed in Eastern and Western Europe after the war. The film analyses demonstrated this opposition as constructed not only in terms of ideological programs, regulatory policies, and architectures, but also through a particular arrangement of bodies in public space. We understand this arrangement as choreographies and want to emphasize their commonality. This is not meant to obscure the differences, as our goal is to examine how the specific constellations of rhythms, movements, and public spaces can manifest the political agenda on screen. The “communist model” of public space is characterized by a planned choreography in the sense of a



centrally orchestrated event that is limited in time and designed for visual representation. If we extend the concept of choreography to the capitalist West, it allows us to see that liberal states also needed to place bodies in public space. In that case, the bodies served the purposes of displaying and performing the freedom of movement and prosperity. The concept of choreography, deriving from the “rhythmanalysis” of public space, eventually aims to overcome the above-discussed binary logics of the postwar era by revealing how the variety of films, ranging from propagandistic to instructional, operated with bodies and their film representation on an abstract political level, inscribing into them the ideological and social order set in the particular society.

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# Section 3

Spaces of Cultural Trauma



The Second World War left visible scars on the urban and rural landscape, as well as invisible scars on the psyche of the survivors. Visual culture and media, including non-fiction film, became a mediator that connected these areas, and by representing ruins as symbols of destruction and new birth, offered narratives of processing and overcoming the trauma of war. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, ruins took on the status of places that, by their incompleteness, remind us of the old, of what was there, and at the same time were a harbinger of the new, of what could be. As such, they stand in the gap between the past and the future. The palpable presence of destruction in the postwar period so fundamentally affected the perception of public space and made it one of the key actors of the era that Dylan Trigg speaks in this sense of a literally “traumatized architecture.” According to Trigg, “the place of trauma vibrates with an indirect language, blocked from interpretation and displacing the certainty of self, memory and place” (Trigg 2009, 99). Yet trauma itself, as Jeffrey C. Alexander reminds us, is at the same time culturally constructed, it is mediated, and as such it is surrounded by different types of images and narratives in which sites of trauma become symbolic sites of pain and suffering, sacrifice, compensation, attribution of responsibility, and the possibility of recovery (Alexander 2004). In the non-fiction film, we see ruins primarily as a place of memory and a starting point for postwar reconstruction, a place brimming with conflicting temporalities, a place of transition where the heavy past, the uncertainty of the present and the high expectations of the future intermingle.

Although we find a number of similarities in representations of trauma and reconstruction in all postwar cultures, be it narrative structures of before and after, metaphors of rebirth, or tropes associated with hopes of welfare and modernization, reclamation, and progress, we want to emphasize a comparative perspective in this section and highlight how the overcoming of trauma occurred in different European states with respect to national cultural traditions and the positions from which these states entered the war, whether they went through it as occupied territory, as invader, as aggressor’s ally, and how they came out of it. In their chapter, Rossella Catanese and Ania Szczepanska thus compare Italian and Polish representations of postwar ruins in relation to the politics of reconstruction. Sylvie Lindeperg and Francesco Pitassio focus on the role of film in the trials of postwar criminals (at Nuremberg and Dachau) and address the transformations of memory in the process of transitional justice in relation to the main urban massacre in Western Europe, the Ardeatine Caves. Perrine Val and Paolo Villa put the image of the architect, as a public figure representative of the reconstruction, at the center of their interest, and problematize how this image functioned

in the French and Italian contexts as a mediator of celebration but also of potential criticism of the reconstruction. Gianmarco Mancosu compares three examples of negotiating the (post)colonial era through non-fiction film, specifically in the context of the relations between the United Kingdom and Togoland, France and Cameroun, and Italy and Somalia.

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# 11. Ruins, Iconic Sites, and Cultural Heritage in Italy and Poland in the Aftermath of World War II

*Rossella Catanese and Ania Szczepanska*

## Abstract

The chapter reflects upon the representation of artistic heritage in Italian and Polish non-fiction cinema after World War II. The question of the postconflict condition of the heritage as ruins is here examined through its presence on screen. The representations of postwar ruins relate to the politics of reconstruction after WWII, in the double effort to state the traumatic memory of war and violence and to give impulse to urban regeneration processes. We would like to offer a comparative survey of the encounters between public art, political memory, and visual culture.

**Keywords:** postwar ruins; transnational perspective; film heritage; postwar trauma

## Memories of the Space in Non-fiction Cinema

This chapter aims to explore the phenomenon of the representation of artistic heritage through Italian and Polish non-fiction films, in particular, those made in the aftermath of WWII. It makes no claim to be encyclopedic or exhaustive, but attempts to develop a comparative framework for the study of a complex coincidence: the question of the postconflict condition of the cultural and architectural heritage as ruins, and its presence on screen, shaped by collective and civic memory. Our goal is to examine the representations of postwar ruins, iconic sites, and artworks, trying to understand how such representations relate to the politics of reconstruction after WWII, stressing the traumatic memory of political violence as an



impulse to regeneration. We would like to offer a comparative survey of the encounters between public art, political memory, and visual culture, within the framework of the mediated memory through cinematic means.

“Visual images of sites can generate constructed images that in turn can create a memory of a place” are words by the architectural historian Shelley Hornstein (2011, 3). The space documented by the documentaries and newsreels of the aftermath of WWII allows us to visually access a beleaguered arena emerging from destruction; in fact, vast swathes of urban and rural areas were destroyed, and together their artistic and monumental heritage. The German occupation and the bomb damage, followed by theft of paintings and sculptures, severely affected extensive areas of the continent, often reducing it to rubble, metaphorically representing the devastated social and political framework of the European countries. The most iconic landmarks and sites became gatekeepers of cultural memory and national identity, enhancing these metaphorical processes and acquiring a new significance in the local and global mindsets, with citizens recognizing themselves into those symbols. After the war, all European nations engaged in the rescue and restoration of their heritage, choosing whether to rebuild it exactly as it was before the war, to modify it in some way or, sometimes, to leave it in ruins, revealing the relevance of such heritage both, according to Paolo Villa, “in the material as well as symbolic reconstruction of the country” (Villa 2021, 56). If cultural, artistic, and architectural heritage has always been acknowledged for its role in the community-making and identity-building, this role has been boosted by the impact of film and media in the twentieth century, which have contributed to building up cultural memory by recording images and discourses on the monumental heritage. According to Astrid Erll, the cultural memory of the last century is “unthinkable without media” (Erll 2011, 113). In fact, cinema shares a certain affinity with the temporalities of remembrance, as well as rewriting and overwriting, joining perception with temporality and memory, and charging temporality with an emotional texture. This applies both to an old fascination with artistic heritage by filmmakers who included monuments and artworks in their movies to enhance an entangled discourse of aesthetics and cultural belonging, both in fiction and non-fiction cinema, and to the specific case of this chapter, that is, the mediatic representation of such heritage through the historic fracture determined by WWII and its recovery process. Thomas Elsaesser reflected on the relation between cinema and trauma: “[C]inema is also the medium par excellence that can make pain and loss palpable, filling absence with an aching sense of presence, which is why moving images have helped give ‘trauma’ a widely understood

cultural meaning” (Elsaesser 2016, 15–16); in this context, non-fiction cinema and its private and public agencies could offer a perspective on the war trauma regarding the artistic and monumental heritage. Such trauma shines through the cultural climate of the late 1940s, which can be interpreted by the complex dichotomy between the need for memory (to avoid history’s mistakes) and the impulse to forget (to turn over a new leaf). In this sense, both the medium of cinema and the practice of art restoration contributed to understanding, reviving, and remembering both the heritage from the past and the wound of wartime.

### **Restructuring of the Film Industry after 1945: Old and New Discourses**

In Poland, the end of WWII marked a radical break in the organization of the film industry. As in most of the countries of the bloc under Soviet influence, the nationalization of all production and distribution structures marked a turning point. It put an end to the market economy and to the private management of cinema (Zajicek 1992). Yet, this profound paradigm shift did not coincide with a renaissance of non-fiction cinema or its engagement with social realities, as had been the case in the USSR in the 1920s. Indeed, Polish newsreels and documentary cinema did not wait for nationalization to report on the social and political realities of their country. Nor did these filmmakers wait for the end of the war to film, on all fronts, the destruction that ravaged the country, the military engagement of Polish troops, and, to a lesser extent, and despite the bans, the consequences of the German occupation on daily life. Filming the ruins of a ravaged country in 1945 was thus part of a social and political history of cinema that began essentially in the 1930s and was largely extended, despite a multitude of obstacles, during the war.

The recording of the living conditions of the different strata of Polish society was part of the commitment of a certain part of the Polish film world in the interwar period. As early as the 1930s, the politically left-wing group *Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Filmu Artystycznego* (START, Society of Enthusiasts for Art Cinema) set itself the goal of producing a “cinema useful to society,” within the framework of a “committed cinephilia” (Biskupski 2017). This group of filmmakers was inspired by the revival of British cinema by its theorist John Grierson and filmmakers working for the Empire Marketing Board, who defended a propaganda cinema capable of accompanying social movements and restoring dignity to the working class. Nourished by

the French and German avant-gardes, as well as by the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s, Polish filmmakers sought to produce a truly artistic cinema, capable of modifying and acting on reality. Their short documentaries depicted the work of children selling newspapers in the streets of big cities, the daily life and the housing problems of the working classes. In the same vein, sensitive to the world around them and aware of the power of the camera, the operators filmed the bombing of Warsaw from the first day of the war. They produced visual traces of the first destructions, as shown, for example, by the iconic images of the Royal Castle of Warsaw on fire in September 1939, filmed by “Starzynski’s crew” (Ozimek 1974). On different fronts, many Polish operators and filmmakers continued to exercise their profession within military structures (Jewsiewiecki 1972). In the east, alongside Soviet operators, they filmed the advance of the Eastern Front on Polish territory, documenting the destruction and abuse of the population, which would serve as evidence for future trials (Szczepanska 2017). *Majdanek: cmentarzysko Europy* (Majdanek: Cemetery of Europe, PL, 1944), *Bitwa o Kołobrzeg* (The Battle of Kołobrzeg, PL, 1945), and *Zagłada Berlina* (The Annihilation of Berlin, PL, 1945) are three essential documents in the filmography of Polish newsreels. At the end of the war, the nationalization of cinema reinforced this dual documentary and memorial function of non-fiction cinema. In 1945, cinema, like photography, was the preferred medium for documenting the state of Polish cities and especially its capital, 85 percent of which had been destroyed.

The Polish documentary films produced in the period 1944–55 show a great diversity of aesthetic approaches and divergent paths. According to Małgorzata Hendrykowska, “[t]hey represent many different pursuits and basic contradictions. [...] These conflicts arose both within the film community, whose members had different attitudes and objectives, and between filmmakers and the authorities” (Hendrykowska 2015b, 84–85). Beyond the debates on so-called “Stalinist” films, which do not cover all the films produced in the period of socialist realism (1949–53), it is important to highlight non-fiction films, which exploited the potential of a poetic documentary language to expose the ruins of the postwar period, while reconnecting with the aesthetics of the avant-gardes of the 1930s. This is particularly the case of the documentary film *Ballada f-moll* (Ballad f-moll, PL, 1945), produced by the composer Andrzej Panufiak in the spring of 1945 in the Young Filmmakers Workshop (Warsztat Filmowy Młodych) founded in Kraków. This ten-minute film, often called “film impression,” is a montage of images of ruins filmed by operator Adolf Forbert, to the rhythm of the expressive music of Frédéric Chopin. The film is an emblematic example of

the possibility of auteur cinema in Poland after 1945 and the possibility of a poetic interpretation of the motif of ruins beyond an ideological discourse of mobilization. However, the film had difficulty being screened in Poland and was not approved by the Warsaw studios, which accused it of a “lack of clarity and technical faults” (Lubelski 2017, 105). It was nevertheless an inspiration in its form, in its tragic and elegiac register, for the famous *Suita Warszawska* (Warsaw suite, PL, 1946) by Tadeusz Makarczynski. This impressive eighteen-minute film, without any commentary, is composed like a triptych that goes from destruction to rebirth of Warsaw: “Catastrophe”/“Return to Life”/“Warsaw Spring,” promoted abroad by the action of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As film historian Jolanta Lemann-Zajicek points out, this film was even seen by President Truman at a White House screening, thus transporting the ruins of the capital to the other side of the Atlantic and marking the American imagination.

The question of reconstructing the capital and the need to speed up the construction of housing for the inhabitants was also one of the favorite themes of the “Black Series,” a set of documentary films produced between 1955 and 1957, widely studied by Polish film historians. Films such as *Warszawa 56* (Warsaw 56, dir. Jerzy Bossak and Jaroslaw Brzozowski, PL, 1956) or *Miasteczko* (Little town, dir. Jerzy Ziarnik, PL, 1957) serve to anticipate and accompany the change of power that took place in October 1956 and the arrival at the head of the party of a new party secretary: Władysław Gomułka.

Denouncing the shortcomings of the bureaucracy and the system in place participated in the political shift and the self-criticism initiated by the communist government: “The attentive columnist”—tells us the voice-over in *Warsaw 56*—observes “what previously we made sure not to notice.” The documentary film thus reveals the unsanitary living conditions, while showing in the background the modern postwar constructions that were the pride of communist power in the Stalinist period. In the mid-1950s, the Polish documentary film demanded a new housing policy and proclaimed it with expressive and poignant cinematic language, as in the famous scene where a baby is tied to a rope by its mother, and which wanders in the ruins of buildings at the risk of his life: “We have built enough office buildings in Warsaw. [...] Apartment buildings belong to working people and their children. We have to give them back.”

In Italy, the postwar reconstruction aimed to re-establish the political spaces as democratic institutions, obliterating the fascist regime in the public discourse as much as possible. This was achieved not only through the practice of elections and the citizen engagement, that is, a public awareness

in the ideological debate, but also through the communication of the new face of the country to be rebuilt and shaped to meet modern needs. As part of this process, non-fiction films were used to expand modes of communication, using the tools of visual storytelling to inform citizens about the reconstruction process. Besides the promotion of big infrastructural investments to solve issues related to housing, public transport, industry, and employment after the destruction of WWII, this use of the cinematic medium, and specifically documentaries and newsreels, also applied to documenting the restoration sites, while engaging the audience with their past through the identity role of the cultural heritage, as specifically performed by the ruins. As Johannes von Moltke stated,

the century-long obsession of cinema with the image of ruins, in turn, is but the visible manifestation of cinema's and the ruin's common function to visualize time and history in modernity. [...] [T]he cinema's specific contribution to a postwar ruin aesthetic must also be sought in a more general effect of the transformation of rubble into representation. (Von Moltke 2010, 396, 405)

Interestingly, many short film production companies took advantage of the law decree of October 1945, which reserved for them 3 percent of the gross income from the screenings; similarly, the laws of 1947 and 1949 allowed the producers to make remarkable profits if their short film was combined with a successful feature film. These films were usually short and did not exceed a 300-meter reel; then the so-called Andreotti Law (Law no. 958, December 29, 1949)<sup>1</sup> reserved an additional percentage for short films “of exceptional technical and cultural value,” an incentive to shoot more and more often in color, also supporting the color cinematography processes developed in Italy by Ferrania (Brunetta 1982; Perniola 2004), based on formulas by Agfacolor. Another interesting element about the production context is the fact that many of the professionals who were trained during the two decades of the fascist regime, under the banner of modernism, translated their experience into a new democratic vocation in these years. The issue of this continuity triggers a reflection on the complex process behind the transition to democracy, questioning a discourse about continuity/break in terms of political framework.

In Poland, no legislative framework really defined documentary production. On the other hand, the year 1949 marked an important turning point

1 <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1949/12/31/049U0958/sg>.

with the inauguration of the Studio of Documentary Films on December 29. In addition, the Vistula Conference took place in the same year, during which the demands of socialist realism were formulated and constituted a “rhetorical closure” and a blow to artists (Madej 1997, 207–14). These new assumptions, however, had little lasting impact on the subsequent development of Polish cinema, which was more driven by the political liberalization that followed the Stalinist period.

### **Documenting Postwar Destruction: Governmental Agency behind the Cameras**

In the immediate postwar period, Polish documentary cinema was therefore based on a documentary tradition and knowledge developed in the 1930s and reinforced during the war. After the war, the representatives of the cinematographic milieu had to adapt to the total reorganization of cinema within Film Polski, a nationalized company. The production and distribution system formulated by the new political power in the period 1945–55, in particular by the Ministry of Information and Propaganda, imposed a centralized conception of cinema (Madej 2002, 56–115). This reorganization was not without tensions and disagreements between artistic and intellectual circles on the role of cinema, particularly documentary, in the new popular Poland and the establishment of the “*kinofikacja*” (“cinefication”: i.e., the policy to increase the number of cinemas). As shown by recent collective work on documentary production between 1945 and 1955 (Hendrykowska 2015b, 15–72), documentary film was not perceived as a marginal production. Even if it attracted less attention from the press and spectators, if there were less political speeches devoted to it, it was very present on the screens, mainly through the newsreels systematically broadcast before the feature fiction film and designed as an integral part of the cinema screening. The development and editorial line of these newsreels were the subject of concern on the part of the new authorities, who sought to make them the main channel for transmitting socialist ideology, by reaffirming their essentially propagandistic function.

The development of documentary cinema, however, was not carried out in a linear or harmonious way. Its institutionalization was carried by personalities with diverse trajectories, commitments, and biographies, who imposed different conceptions on non-fiction cinema. The newsreel series *Polska Kronika Filmowa* (PKF, Polish Film Chronicle) was initiated in 1944 and directed by Jerzy Bossak then by Helena Lemańska, in addition to the

production of the documentary film studio WFDiF (Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych i Fabularnych) founded in 1949. These two institutions constituted the main pillars of production of non-fiction cinema in Poland between 1945 and 1989.

In Italy, the postwar years saw the increase of non-fiction film production exhibiting Italian and Western European programs of reconstruction, with the purpose of educating citizens about the governmental efforts towards both modernization and restoration. Hundreds of short films were sponsored by public and private entities, such as the American ECA (Economic Cooperation Administration), which coordinated the Marshall Plan in Western European countries; and by the Italian state, in particular by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers through the Centro di Documentazione (Documentation Center), which commissioned work from Istituto Luce (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa), formerly a Fascist institution, as well as other private production companies (such as Documento Film, which also worked for the ECA). It is safe to say that Italian documentaries and newsreels covering the destruction, reconstruction, and restoration of artistic and architectural heritage in postwar years were produced in large numbers and documented the different phases of the recovery process. The first five years implied a strong effort, sensed as a race against time. Despite the rescue and restoration of monuments and sites could not be considered a priority in a starving country facing the war trauma, "the attention it received in public discourse proves its relevance for the country" (Villa 2021, 60). If the first step acknowledged a mourning for the loss of art treasures, metaphor for the general devastation and disaster in Italy (1942–45), between the 1946 and the 1950 documentaries and newsreels narrated the first reconstructions and emergency restorations, whereas in the ten years following 1947 the discourse also covered the rearrangement and reopening of museums, and the return of looted artworks (Villa 2021, 60–61). The three phases described by Villa also involve some political implications which determine the way these artworks, monuments, and sites are described as functional for the different purposes of different political factions. In fact, in the earliest years the grief related to the destruction of such artistic heritage in Italy was used for Fascist propaganda as proof of the cruelty of the enemies, who were bombing sites full of history and precious monuments without any regret. These arguments were also central to emphasize the role of artistic and monumental heritage as a privileged site for enhancing Italian cultural identity and its national mythology, bombed and destroyed by the barbarism of the adversaries. In newsreels, this symbolic rhetoric was also associated with religious sentiments, when the devastation involved



Figure 11.1. The Basilica of San Lorenzo in Rome. Still from *I monumenti italiani e la guerra* (Italian monuments and the war, dir. Giampiero Pucci, IT, 1946–48). Courtesy of Archivio Storico Istituto Luce Cinecittà.

churches and cathedrals (in Genoa, Cagliari, Palermo, Rome, Parma, Padua, and many other cities), combining the loss of artworks with the feeling of disrespect to religious symbols. This approach changed throughout the late 1940s and the mid-1960s, when the rise of political forces opposed to the Fascist regime dedicated a different tone to the recent memory of the war as an evitable wound that also had to be borne as a painful scar by the glorious artistic heritage.

### Public Documentation of Restoration

After 1945, the heritage rescue effort was shown by newsreels and documentaries as a chance to recover and symbolically overcome the war. Many statues and artworks that had been removed before the war, to prevent them from being destroyed by the bombings, were reinstalled in their original places and the replacement was shown as a full-fledged ceremony for the symbolic role that such artworks got in the identity of the space and in the general feeling about their metonymic significance in the *genius loci*. In Venice, the relocation of the bronze lion and horses in San Marco's square



(the first on the famous column and the second on the façade of the church) was celebrated in a newsreel.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in the 1950s, many plundered Italian artworks were restituted from Germany and often displayed in special exhibitions, which also became ways to reaffirm and celebrate the liberation once again. In the immediate aftermath of WWII, historians and critics founded the National Association for the Restoration of War-damaged Monuments; among them, the art historian Emilio Lavagnino was the editor of the association's book *Cinquanta monumenti italiani danneggiati dalla guerra* (Fifty Italian monuments damaged by the war), a photographic catalog related to the Met exhibition *War's Toll on Italian Art* (1946) (Villa 2021, 64). The documentary *I monumenti italiani e la guerra* (Italian monuments and the war, dir. Giampiero Pucci, IT, 1946–48)<sup>3</sup> exhibited the war damage on Italian monuments and artistic heritage, as well as the results of the restoration efforts. The film, produced by the Istituto Luce for Cineteca Scolastica, the state film archive in charge of producing and distributing didactic films for schools, involved as consultant Lavagnino himself, being one of the most relevant figures in the rescue process of Italian artistic heritage. The restoration process in the film gives a layer of symbolic significance to the rescue work, since the recovery of Italy's glorious artistic past takes on the meaning of recovering Italian identity after the war. In fact, the film travels from Padua to Turin, from Florence to Rome, from Rimini to Montecassino, from Naples to Milan, the documentary provides the viewer with "a sort of postwar 'grand tour' among ruins and scaffolds" (Villa 2021, 65). The ending of the film shows the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro (ICR, Central Institute for Restoration) in Rome, also featured in another documentary, *Anatomia del colore* (Anatomy of color, dir. Attilio Riccio and Primo Zeglio, IT, 1948),<sup>4</sup> scripted by literary and art critic Emilio Cecchi. Here, the ICR is explored by showing the restorers at work on famous

2 *Venezia: cessata la guerra, vengono di nuovo installati nelle loro sedi originali il leone e i cavalli di bronzo di piazza San Marco* (Venice: Once the war is over, the bronze lion and horses in San Marco's square are once again installed in their original locations, Notiziario Nuova Luce, IT, 1945, <http://fondoluce.archivioluice.com/LuceUnesco/notiziario-nuova-luce/scheda/video/IL5000052864/2/Venezia-cessata-la-guerra-vengono-di-nuovo-installati-nelle-loro-sedi-originali-il-leone-e-i-cavalli-di-bronzo-di-piazza-San-Marco.html?language=EN&start=0>.

3 [https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL300000006/1/i-monumenti-italiani-e-guerra.html?startPage=0&jsonVal=%7B%22jsonVal%22:%7B%22query%22:\[%22monumenti%20italiani%20e%20la%20guerra%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20%7D%7D](https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL300000006/1/i-monumenti-italiani-e-guerra.html?startPage=0&jsonVal=%7B%22jsonVal%22:%7B%22query%22:[%22monumenti%20italiani%20e%20la%20guerra%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20%7D%7D).

4 [https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000050662/1/anatomia-del-colore.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:\[%22Anatomia%20del%20colore%20%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000050662/1/anatomia-del-colore.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:[%22Anatomia%20del%20colore%20%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}).

painting; it is interesting how, just in the title, a medical metaphor is used to describe the restoration activities, not only emphasizing the accurate and meticulous work performed on works of art such as *Annunciata* (Virgin Annunciate), the fifteenth-century painting by Antonello da Messina, but also the analogy with a surgical intervention stressed a “humanized” version of cultural heritage.

Both for artworks and architecture, the mantra was to bring each of them back or rebuild everything “where it was and how it was.” For instance, in a newsreel about the reconstruction of Ponte Santa Trinita,<sup>5</sup> a Renaissance bridge designed by Michelangelo and built by Bartolomeo Ammannati in 1571, images introduce the bridge destroyed by the retreating Nazis in 1944. The bridge was one of the symbols of wartime destruction in Florence, so its reconstruction was equally symbolic. The same bridge was the protagonist of *Dov’era e com’era. La ricostruzione del Ponte Santa Trinita di Firenze* (Where it was and how it was: The reconstruction of Santa Trinita Bridge in Florence, dir. Riccardo Melani and Bernardo Seeber, IT, 1958), with commentary by the architect Riccardo Gizdulich, who was responsible for the reconstruction of the bridge. At the time of the bridge’s inauguration, the historic Odeon theater, in Florence, screened this film for the citizens. The first part of the title, *Dov’era e com’era*, means “where it was and how it was,” defining the main thesis behind the ideological perspective on restoration. According to the American critic Bernard Berenson, the complete reconstruction of the bridge should follow the existing appearance; the Italian Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, on the other hand, argued for a reconstruction that adopted a modern language rather than the rhetoric of false antiquity, for the right to live in a living city free of rhetoric (Vlad Borrelli 2010).

In fact, the concept of reconstruction as rebuilding with total fidelity to the original building is not easy to be applied, since the need to adapt to the new regulations and uses requires a more flexible meaning of morphological and typological conservation, using the original finishing materials as far as possible. Replicating the “form” of a destroyed work is a historical fake, according to Cesare Brandi, because “form” cannot be separated from “matter,” the two entities live in a co-extensive way (Brandi 1977). Even the Santa Trinita bridge in Florence was rebuilt with non-recycled materials, with

5 *Ricostruzione dello storico ponte distrutto dalle truppe tedesche prima di lasciare la città* (Reconstruction of the historic bridge destroyed by German troops before leaving the city, La settimana Incom, IT, March 31, 1949), [https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000012457/2/ricostruzione-dello-storico-ponte-distrutto-dalle-truppe-tedesche-prima-lasciare-citta.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:\[%22santa%20trinita%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000012457/2/ricostruzione-dello-storico-ponte-distrutto-dalle-truppe-tedesche-prima-lasciare-citta.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:[%22santa%20trinita%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}).

new and different technologies (significant parts in reinforced concrete), sometimes with different morphologies, because the bridge had to be adapted to the dynamic loads of modern traffic. Similarly, the reconstruction of the historical centers of Warsaw and Gdańsk was relevant because both cities were razed to the ground by the Nazis in order to erase the identity of the Polish people; despite being faithful as possible to the originals, the differences are obvious and documented. The architects could not reproduce the pre-existing buildings identically, but only the *forma urbis* (shape of the city) as it was reconstructed from maps and perspective representations (historical and modern). Therefore, the “where it was and how it was” concept has taken on a more psychological and anthropological meaning than a physical-architectural one.

### **The Process of Reconstruction in the Newsreels: How to Show Modernity**

As in Italy immediately after the war, the Polish authorities used documentary images to report on the reconstructions in progress throughout the country. This function was mainly carried by filmed newsreels. An audio-visual rhetoric of rediscovered collective energy and of the mobilized and united community was then put in place. Unlike Italy, the images were exclusively filmed in black-and-white. The first Polish chronicle filmed in color was shot in the 1950s using the Soviet film Sovcolor. It was not until the 1970s, however, that a monthly column was produced in color, reserved for public events deemed important.

The theme of the capital's reconstruction came up many times in the newsreels to follow the work of the Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy (BOS, Bureau for the Reconstruction of the Capital). On the drawings of the destruction immortalized by the architects, the commentary insists on the fact that the old monuments which were “the pride” of the city will regain “their brilliance.” He goes on to say that they will take place in “a new Warsaw,” “testimony to the will of a nation,” which is rebuilding on the ruins “a new life, an even more beautiful life.” The fifteen-minute film *Budujemy Warszawę* (We build Warsaw, PL, 1945), made by Stanisław Urbanowicz, is also an accomplished example. After showing the faces of the “murderers of Warsaw” in Nazi uniform, the chronicle presents the destruction of Warsaw as the result of German “cruelty and precision” embodied in artillery plans preparing for fire. Dramatic images of the burning Church of the Holy Cross and scattered corpses in the ruins are accompanied by aerial footage of



Figure 11.2. Still from *Warszawa 56* (Warsaw 56, dir. Jerzy Bossak and Jaroslaw Brzozowski, PL, 1956).

the burning capital. But “Warsaw wants to live!” In a lyrical and dramatic commentary, to the rhythm of long tracking shots filmed on the ground, which show the immensity of the destruction, the dominant rhetoric aims to challenge the spectator to “Look!” It also pays tribute to this “people who are the first to mobilize for the reconstruction of their capital.” We then see columns of men and women marching valiantly through the ruins, shovel in hand, like soldiers in a new battle: the reconstruction of the capital “from new foundations.” To the rhythm of lively symphonic music composed by Roman Palester, we follow the manufacture of bricks and all the machines and trades mobilized, because “all of Poland is rebuilding Warsaw!”

The theme of reconstruction developed in the newsreels was also linked to that of “reconquered lands” in the west. The displacement of the country’s borders following the Yalta agreements in February 1945 caused Poland to lose its lands in the east and expand to the west. As recent work by Polish historians (Kledzik, Michalski, and Praczyk 2017) shows, the famous “reclaimed lands” became part of the development of an imaginary based on a mythical unity carried by literature, the press, and political speeches. Although audiovisual sources are still underexploited by historians, as the historian Traba regrets, for example (Traba 2015, 50), documentary images fully participated in the development of this official narrative by showing

the “departure” of the German populations and the installation of the Polish populations coming from the East. The commentaries on the newsreels, read solemnly, thus insist on the ancient Polish identity of these lands as in this chronicle of 1945 (12/45): “Wrocław, former capital of the Piasts of Silesia, finally returns to the Fatherland.” With the Polish flag in the foreground, panoramic views of Wrocław show crumbling buildings. The voice then takes on a dramatic tone to denounce “those Germans who persisted in destroying this city knowing that it was going to be taken from them forever.” The comment calls for justice in the name of the Polish people: “We don’t want revenge,” and brings new hope: “We will rebuild Polish Wrocław!” This reconstruction is shown as the fruit of cooperation between the Soviet and Polish authorities, who can be seen on screen in uniforms of both armies. The “departure” of the German populations is filmed in order to underline the help provided by the Poles to the German populations, like in a scene where professors from the University of Wrocław leave their apartment building with a smile on their faces and embark on carts filled with huge bags, in order to make room for Polish professors in the new Polish university. “The German penetration into Silesia is definitively annihilated.”

In chronicle 44/52, *Wrocław Will Be Rebuilt*, the question of reconstruction is addressed with the aim of harmoniously combining tradition and modernity. On plans of architects at work and drawings of façades, to the sound of a light and joyful flute melody, the commentary first exposes the plans for “reconstruction and transformation” by emphasizing “piety” at the regard to the “sumptuous” old town which will be faithfully rebuilt according to its ancient form. On the right bank of the Oder, on the other hand, “the new Wrocław” will take shape, thanks to the construction of industrial complexes and the largest residential area in the region. Nothing is said or shown of the dwellings which are there and which will have to be demolished in order to allow the emergence of these new districts, which we simply see as a model on the screen. In 1965, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of “Polish Wrocław,” the newsreels reused German newsreels filmed in “Breslau” (the German name of the city) in May 1945 in order to show the destruction and the ruins. The Polish voice is superimposed on the original German commentary that we nevertheless hear, to circumvent its meaning and attribute “these criminal destructions” to the “Nazi armies.” The chronicle reuses these archive images in order to underline, only a few seconds later, the successful reconstruction and the modernity of this urban center, capital of the industrial, scientific, and cultural life of lower Silesia.

In Italy, the display of modernity as a chance to move forward from the ruins of WWII destruction also shows another contrast: the clear opposition

between modernity and antiquity, where modernity, together with its technology and its aesthetics, is featured by a positivist reading towards the demands required by modern transports, infrastructures, living and working places, whereas antiquity deals with a wider discourse on cultural and artistic heritage, to be protected and enhanced. Such a heritage, sometimes in a state of neglect, despite being deep-rooted in the cultural identity of the country, clashes with the new societal needs. For instance, in the newsreels there is a visible effort to promote modern urban expansion even in the beautiful landscape of the art cities, where the ancient areas seem somehow relics of an unintelligible past—like the ancient gates of Rome, now “treasures only for tourists or scholars.”<sup>6</sup> The Italian art cities grow at fast speed both horizontally, incorporating peripheral and rural areas, and vertically, with the first skyscrapers, epitome of modern architecture, appearing in Milan, Genoa, or Palermo.<sup>7</sup> In a newsreel about the Sicilian main city,<sup>8</sup> skyscrapers are framed from below, towering over the viewer with their height; moreover, in this newsreel the clean whiteness of the new buildings opposes the dark tones of the town center. This is part of a general tendency, developed in the postwar years, to promote a positivist faith in technological progress, discussing the way a modern city should deal with its past and advocating for a substitution of the old with the new. Besides newsreels celebrating the renovated face of modern towns, the entrance of modernity into the historical heritage of the Italian urban landscape is also celebrated by industrial films. For instance, *Sud come Nord* (South like North, dir. Nelo Risi, IT, 1957)<sup>9</sup> is a film that describes the Olivetti industrial

6 *Le città crescono* (The cities grow, La settimana Incom, IT, July 17, 1957), [https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000032424/2/le-citta-crescono.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:%22Le%20citt%C3%A0%20crescono%20%22},%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000032424/2/le-citta-crescono.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:%22Le%20citt%C3%A0%20crescono%20%22},%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}).

7 *Grattacieli d'Italia* (Italian skyscrapers, Mondo Libero, IT, November 18, 1955), [https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000045054/2/grattacieli-d-italia.html?startPage=60&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:%22grattacieli%22,%22\\*:%22},%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000045054/2/grattacieli-d-italia.html?startPage=60&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:%22grattacieli%22,%22*:%22},%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}); *Grattacieli a Milano. Tra non molto, la capitale lombarda come New York* (Skyscrapers in Milan: The capital of Lombardy will be like New York before long, La settimana Incom, IT, October 5, 1955), [https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000029633/2/grattacieli-milano-non-molto-capitale-lombarda-come-new-york.html?startPage=40&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:%22grattacieli%22,%22\\*:%22},%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000029633/2/grattacieli-milano-non-molto-capitale-lombarda-come-new-york.html?startPage=40&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:%22grattacieli%22,%22*:%22},%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}).

8 *Problemi e soluzioni dell'urbanistica* (Problems and solutions of urban planning, La settimana Incom, IT, February 29, 1956), [https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000034200/2/problemi-e-soluzioni-urbanistica.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:%22Problemi%20urbanistica%22},%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000034200/2/problemi-e-soluzioni-urbanistica.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:%22Problemi%20urbanistica%22},%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}).

9 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4u6Rhq\\_GF&t=882s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4u6Rhq_GF&t=882s).

plant in Pozzuoli (Naples), promoting Italian industry for the development of the country to overcome the traditional stereotype of the pauperism of Southern Italy. The film aims at magnifying modernity and technology to associate it to the specificity of the southern anthropological forms. Through the social impact of the factory, the film recounts the transformation of the town, providing domestic and foreign viewers with proof that the Italian economy was flourishing at a national level. *Sud come Nord* argued that once structural and political inequalities had disappeared, Pozzuoli not only resembled any city in the north of Italy, but possessed the same features and capabilities, demystifying stereotypes about the anthropological predispositions of lazy and passive southerners (Bonifazio 2014, 115). The idea of a “South as North,” clearly expressed in the title of the Olivetti film dedicated to the Pozzuoli factory, comes to terms with the same rhetoric of industrial productivity as a symbol of progress. The film’s opening introduces the space of the town from the images of local tradition, which triggers the recognition and representation of the place through the liveliness of the fish market, an icon of Southern Italy. The voice-over comments on the role of the men selling fish, who are often unaware of ancient history, namely that of the ancient food market at the temple of Serapis immersed in the water. Like the temple, the amphitheater recalls a link with the ancient past of the south and its archaic splendor, but is juxtaposed with modern architecture through a montage whose connecting element is the presence of olive trees, another leitmotif of the meridian landscape. These are the typical juxtapositions of “an environment in which industrial civilization is penetrating more and more deeply,” as the voice-over states. Therefore, here the landscape of Pozzuoli is featured as picturesque folklore rather than artistic heritage. This is to show the ancient architectural legacy as unsuited to modern and industrial life.

In a parallel and contrary path, it is not by chance that in the mid-1950s, the historic centers of art cities and hamlets became the subject of several art documentaries. Art historian Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, who also directed films about art, devoted some of his “critical films” (known as *critofilms*) to the ancient town centers of Lucca, Siena, Pisa, Venice, underlining their unique shapes, their century-old relation to the landscape in a coherent, aesthetic unity, highlighting the peculiarities of the *genius loci* in a consistent opposition to the modernist standardization of postwar reconstruction projects.<sup>10</sup>

10 Ragghianti and his *critofilms* had a pivotal role in the panorama of European postwar art documentaries; they have constituted an original and unique example for their exclusive combination of film language and art criticism; see Casini 2010; Ciacci 2010.



Figure 11.3. The Temple of Serapis submerged in water by bradyseism (deformation of the surface caused by subsidence interrupted by periods of rapid uplift). Still from *Sud come Nord* (South like North, dir. Nelo Risi, IT, 1957). Courtesy of Archivio Nazionale Cinema Impresa.

### The Debate Today

The reconstruction of Warsaw has been the subject of intense historiographical debates until today. The collective work *Spór o odbudowę Warszawy* (Conflict over the reconstruction of Warsaw), edited by Tomasz Fudali in 2016 during the exhibition organized at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, perfectly reflects these controversies. Following the paths of microhistory, this collective work shows the dilemmas and the decisions made by the various architects who joined the BOS, founded on February 14, 1945, by the president of the city Marian Spychalski and directed by architect Jan Zachwatowicz. Above all, the book sheds light on the narratives chosen to legitimize or delegitimize the processes of reconstruction in Warsaw. Shedding new light on these debates makes it possible to deconstruct the myth of a “foreign city” imposed by the Soviet authorities, a narrative that took hold after 1989 during the process of reprivatizing buildings and spaces. These recent works, on the contrary, highlight a necessary modernization that finds its roots in the avant-garde ideas of the interwar period. The parallels with the reconstruction processes in Rotterdam, Berlin, or Le Havre also allow us to grasp the specificity of the process in Warsaw in 1945. In the Polish capital, the main issue was “the sanitation of space,” the improvement



of the living conditions of its inhabitants and its aesthetics. However, this question did not emerge from the rubble of 1945. It had taken shape at the end of the 1930s in the desire to modernize the city, starting with the central avenue of Nowy Świat (Sołtys 2011) in order to adapt it to the new needs of its inhabitants. These projects had not been realized, but the Polish architects hired by the BOS in 1945 revived these ideas. They were also confronted with contradictory pressures: the new postwar political and economic conditions based on a general nationalization process, the need to quickly rebuild residential accommodation while meeting the demands of the Department of Monument Architecture. Still today, the role of the Polish “Black Series,” a set of documentaries produced between 1955 and 1957 in public debates on the choices of reconstruction of the Polish capital after 1956 appears central. Documentary cinema played a full part in the self-criticism of the party at the turn of 1955–56: showing the ruins in which the Poles were still living while emphasizing the modernity of certain administrative buildings proved that the actions undertaken were still insufficient and legitimized the arrival of a new management team aware of the problems and determined to solve them.

The motif of the ruins of Warsaw continues to be mobilized in the twenty-first century within the framework of public policies and commemorations. This is the case for the audiovisual productions initiated by the Warsaw Uprising Museum founded in 2004 on the sixtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising. The film *Miasto ruin* (The city of ruins, dir. Damian Nenow, PL, 2010), produced by the museum by using new digital and animation techniques, offers a spectacular 3D vision of the ruins of Warsaw in aerial views.

Without any commentary, with extremely lyrical music, this production is part of a desire for “immersion” displayed by the permanent exhibition of the museum, of which it is one of the central elements. The trailer for the film and the media campaign that surrounded it insisted that it was “the world’s first digital reconstruction,” emphasizing the technological modernity employed and inviting the viewer to come to the museum to discover an unprecedented vision of the ruins of the capital. This type of production is part of a material policy that wishes to renew a patriotic narrative intended to nourish the martyrological vision of Polish history, intended to address new generations and awaken their empathy for the tragic past of their country, thanks to the fascination for the new techniques used. Rare, even almost nonexistent, are the critical voices raised to analyze the effects of this type of documentary production and the political discourse it implies. The reuse of the motif of the ruins of the capital, retouched by animation and digital techniques, is particularly effective in impressing and feeding the fears of citizens, fully participating in the discourse of patriotic mobilizations for national defense. Internationally, the most recent debates



Figure 11.4. A reconstruction in color and 3D of an aerial view of Warsaw in 1945. Still from *Miasto ruin* (The city of ruins, dir. Damian Nenow, PL, 2010).

have focused on the narrative of postwar art looting, the destruction and the so-called “Monuments Men.”<sup>11</sup>

In Italy, the most interesting work in this direction is the documentary *L'arte in guerra* (Art in war, dir. Massimo Becattini, IT, 2016), produced for the Italian national television broadcasting channel RAI 3's TV series *La Grande Storia*, by the production company Film Documentari d'Arte (Art Documentary Films). It tells the story of those Italians who committed themselves to recovering the national artistic heritage during WWII, in particular the story of Rodolfo Siviero, secret service agent and perhaps double agent (first a Fascist and then a partisan), Emilio Lavagnino, a

<sup>11</sup> The Monuments Men were a group of individuals who played a crucial role in protecting and recovering cultural treasures during and after World War II. The Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) program, commonly known as the Monuments Men, was established by the Allied forces, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, during World War II. It was officially founded in 1943 as part of the Allied effort to protect cultural heritage during the conflict. It included a diverse group of individuals with expertise in various fields related to art and cultural preservation, such as art historians, museum curators, archaeologists, architects, and other experts in the arts and culture. Notable members included George L. Stout, James Rorimer, and Rose Valland. Their primary mission was to prevent the destruction or theft of important cultural and artistic works by the Axis powers (Nazi Germany, in particular) during the war. This involved the tasks of identification, documentation, preservation, recovery, repatriation, investigation, and prosecution. The efforts of the Monuments Men helped save countless priceless artworks and cultural artifacts from destruction or theft. Their work also laid the foundation for international agreements and organizations focused on the protection of cultural heritage, such as the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. See also the famous fiction film *Monuments Men* (dir. George Clooney, US, 2014).

ministry official in Rome, and Pasquale Rotondi, superintendent of the Gallerie delle Marche, who fought for an important mission: the safeguarding of the huge artistic heritage preserved in Italy's main museums, including the Uffizi in Florence. The three stories of Siviero, Lavagnino, and Rotondi are intertwined in the same battle against the Nazi raids and the protection of works of art from "friendly fire," from the bombing by the American Allies, a sort of hunt for Italian art treasures, courageously carried out by officials who, risking their own lives, hid them in secret places, or recovered them, taking them away from the Nazis thanks to adventurous intelligence work.

In contrast to the three-dimensional reconstruction work of *Miasto Ruin*, in Becattini's film a large part of the heritage is shown through a combination of ex-novo filming of the locations described and some reuse of pre-existing material, including documentaries and Luce newsreels or other military film documentation. Thus, contemporary color images alternate with more crude black-and-white footage from the wartime period, guided by a voice-over that reconstructs the historical events with an explicit didactic and pedagogical purpose. This refers both to contemporary documentaries produced for the television (and particularly a channel dedicated to history) and for the attitude of the original footage, from WWII and the postwar years, in a direct continuity with the vocation of the 1940s and 1950s newsreels and documentary films.

In conclusion, we aim to emphasize the liveness of contemporary debates about reconstruction and returned artworks in the Italian and Polish contexts, symbolic for two different European countries with different histories and fates, and somehow representative of reconstruction efforts in Eastern and Western Europe. If non-fiction cinema has already raised questions about the importance of artistic heritage in the postconflict condition, we think that the lesson represented by these materials has left its mark on the imagery of current forms of discussion, analysis, and debates on the heritage, both as ruin and looted/returned artwork. Such marks and traces are still ongoing in defining a contemporary elaboration of the politics of reconstruction after WWII.

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## 12. Moving Accountability

Trials, Transitional Justice, and Documentary Cinema<sup>1</sup>

*Sylvie Lindeperg and Francesco Pitassio*

### Abstract

The chapter focuses on the role cinema played in documenting and supporting “transitional justice” at both a transnational and a national level. Allied organized trials prosecuting Nazi politicians, administrators, and soldiers, who were held responsible for perpetrating crimes in several different nations across Europe. Such were the cases of the Nuremberg and Dachau trials. However, the role filmmaking played in documenting and interacting with the trials greatly varied, according to the political value assigned to respective judgments and, therefore, the function courts deemed suitable for cinema itself.

**Keywords:** transitional justice, Nuremberg, Dachau, Army Signal Corps, Italy, Luchino Visconti

### Postwar/Postjustice? The Controversial Enforcement of Justice in the War’s Aftermath

The conflict’s end left not only material ruins all over Europe, but a sense of precariousness and uncertainty concerning the law. Previous totalitarian

<sup>1</sup> The chapter has been commonly discussed and conceived. Francesco Pitassio wrote the paragraphs “Post-war/Post-justice? The Controversial Enforcement of Justice in the War’s Aftermath” and “Giorni di gloria and the Portray of Transitional Justice in Italy”, Sylvie Lindeperg the paragraphs “Judgement and punishment in Occupied Germany” (Text translated by Carmella Abramowitz-Moreau) and the “Conclusions”. The part devoted to the filming of the Nuremberg trial is largely inspired by Sylvie Lindeperg’s book: *Nuremberg, la bataille des images*, Paris, Payot, 2021. Francesco Pitassio would like to express his gratitude to Mario Musumeci and Cosimo Tassinari, for sharing valuable information and sources.

and authoritarian regimes subjugated courts and altered juridical frameworks to the benefit of ruling administrations, the most ominous cases of said amendments being the Nuremberg Laws in Germany (1935) or the Italian racial laws (1938). The transition to postwar democracies implied the enhancement of a renewed sense of justice, notably regarding the past. However, prosecuting past regimes, civil servants, or military personnel for crimes that usually could not be defined as such when perpetrated, was an eminently political act, whose aims included building a new collective memory and identity. All in all, the memory designed after World War II bestowed guilt exclusively on Germany, and a landmark such as the Nuremberg trials (1945–46) explicitly fashions this memory, by opposing an international jury to the Third Reich's political, industrial, and military elite. However, as English historian Tony Judt posits, holding Nazi Germany as the sole—or at least principle—entity responsible for warfare, antisemitism, forced labor, confiscations, etc., engendered a European “double memory”:

Two sorts of memories thus emerged: that of things done to “us” by Germans in the war, and the rather different recollections (however similar) done by “us” to others after the war. [...] Two moral vocabularies, two sorts of reasoning, two different pasts. In this circumstance, the uncomfortably confusing recollections of things done by us to others during the war (i.e., under German auspices) got conveniently lost. [...] If Germans were guilty, then “we” were innocent. (Judt 2000, 298)

Postwar prosecution for war crimes and collaborationism with (German) occupying forces was uneven in Europe, according to newly ruling administrations, past regimes, and events happening in the interwar and war periods. Such inconsistency, while creating a continental shared memory (i.e., Germans are the sole responsible), also led to different, often fractured remembrances of respective national experience. For instance, whereas in Czechoslovakia a number of decrees singled out collaborators on an almost ethnic basis (Czechoslovak citizens belonging to German or Hungarian ethnic groups) (Frommer 2004), and in France the epuration struck hard and at different levels of the state apparatus of the former Vichy republic (Rousso 1992; Bergère 2018), Italy was much more forgetful and tolerant towards Fascism, despite the fact that Mussolini's regime was a template for many authoritarian or totalitarian regimes throughout Europe, including the Third Reich (Domenico 1996).

The justice which courts administered in the phase between the end of warfare and the first steps of newborn states, judging crimes perpetrated

during the conflict, was a transitional one. According to political scientists, the aftermath of World War II experienced the first wave of transitional justice in Europe, the second happening in Southern Europe (Greece, Spain, and Portugal) as respective authoritarian regimes came to an end in the 1970s, and the third in the former Soviet Bloc, when the Iron Curtain fell in 1989 (Barahona de Brito, Aguilar, and González-Enríquez 2001). Transitions between non-democratic and democratic regimes can happen in different ways, according to different degrees of negotiation between previously ruling elites and their democratic successors. However, by judging past deeds, which were often legally admitted beforehand, singling out defendants for them, and determining what is now acceptable and what is deemed to be rejected from an ominous past, justice serves a political and memorial function, and by doing so somehow reveals an arbitrary nature, in violation of its basic principle: *nulla poena sine lege* (no punishment without law). Transitional justice embodies—or pretends to do so—the will of the people, which is the kernel and pristine energy of politics (Laclau 2005). Nonetheless, because of its arbitrariness, it requires proper support and consensus. Documentary cinema performed this function in the postwar era. If we agree with Bill Nichols, who posits that “documentary is about the effort to convince, persuade, or predispose us to a particular view of the actual world we occupy. [...] Documentary not only activates our aesthetic awareness (unlike a strictly informational or training film), it also activates our social consciousness,” (2001, 69) then postwar documentary contributed to redesigning narratives of the past and magnifying the role of transitional justice. In fact, documentary cinema and trials have an affinity in the common task of determining the truth through evidence and an associated narrative. As Kristen Fuhs claims,

Documentaries about trials intervene in the production of cultural memory and shape the social legacy of their trial narratives. But often the manner through which these films interrogate legal truth and produce a truth of their own leaves a unique record of “what really happened,” a record that may or may not support the official decision of the legal institution. (2014, 784–85)

In order to grasp the role documentary cinema held in conveying the sense of transitional justice to the lay public, we focus on two case histories, illustrating different examples of administering justice for war crimes and cleansing the previous state apparatus. Firstly, we shall look at how Allied forces brought to court accountable Nazis in Nuremberg and Dachau, and how transnational crews of filmmakers implemented different modes of



representing transitional justice; then, we shall scrutinize how a national endeavor refashioned Italian collective memory, magnified transitional justice, and paid homage to the victims of the main urban massacre in Western Europe, that is, the Ardeatine Caves.

### **Judgment and Punishment in Occupied Germany: Images of the Dachau and Nuremberg Trials and the Issues They Reveal**

In November 1945, in the American occupation zone of defeated Germany, the US opened two major series of trials. The first was organized in Dachau, the former concentration camp. There, the military court of the US Third Army judged the assassins of Buchenwald, Dachau, Dora-Nordhausen, Flossenburg, and Mauthausen, as well as those responsible for the massacre of the American prisoners near Malmedy, in the Ardennes region of Belgium.<sup>2</sup> The second series of trials took place in Nuremberg. In November 1945, the entirely renovated Palace of Justice of the town housed the International Military Tribunal established by the US, Great Britain, the USSR, and France. The judgment of twenty-two leading Nazi officials was followed by twelve further trials, known as the Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings. These were conducted only by the American military tribunals and ran until 1948.

These judicial procedures implemented the decisions taken by the Allies in 1943. The Moscow Declaration of German Atrocities made the distinction between two categories of criminal: those who had committed their crimes in a single geographical location would be sent back there for trial; the major war criminals whose crimes could not be “geographically localized” would be “punished by joint decision” of the Allied governments. An examination of the major trial of Nuremberg and the first trials of Dachau sheds light on the challenges of each and shows how the conditions of filming at each location impacted their media coverage.

In May 1945, Robert Jackson, the US chief prosecutor, began preparing the international trial of Nuremberg that he was to oversee. In Dachau, William Denson, an American military prosecutor, was given the task of forming a team of lawyers, recruiting the counsel for the defense and preparing the case for the prosecution. Denson’s priority was to document the atrocities committed and ensure that the sentences obtained were sufficiently severe

2 The Malmedy massacre (December 17, 1944) was a series of war crimes committed by members of the Waffen-SS against American prisoners of war and some Belgian civilians during the Battle of the Bulge (December 16, 1944–January 25, 1945).

to dissuade any future criminals from committing similar crimes. His main targets were twofold: first, the German population, which required denazification through the condemnation of Hitler's barbarity; second, the opinion of Americans, traumatized by what had been discovered in the camps and needing to be convinced that justice would be done.

Jackson's objectives were wider-ranging and more ambitious. Most importantly, he wanted to use international law to guarantee peace, ensure that his conception of justice prevailed, and extol the virtues of American democracy. From June 1945 onwards, the American prosecution put together a large-scale information campaign to influence worldwide opinion prior to, during, and after the trial. The campaign would unfold in the form of a moral, edifying play that would propagate the American vision of the war and the trial. The underlying idea was to impose a narrative as much as it was to deliver a verdict, and cinema would play an all-important role. Very early on, Jackson decided to use film footage and photographs as evidence in the courtroom, and to film the hearings. The filming of the hearings would provide material for the news media; a major documentary would be made to draw the lessons of the Nuremberg trial. Initially, this task was assigned to the Field Photographic Branch, directed by John Ford and part of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the then US intelligence agency. This project, however, was short-lived, and in September the military cameramen of the Army Signal Corps took over.

The idea of bringing cameras into the courtroom was by no means self-evident to the Americans. In 1937, after the media ruckus caused by the trial of Bruno Hauptmann, the murderer of the Lindbergh baby,<sup>3</sup> cameramen were banned from American courtrooms. In this the US was following the example of Great Britain, where, in 1925, all photography and filming in the courts was banned. In France, newsreel cameramen filmed the highest profile trials from time to time using cameras without audio recording devices. Of the four member countries of the tribunal, only the USSR had a well-established tradition of filming trials, one that went back to the 1920s. When the October Revolution began, Soviet authorities ordered certain political trials to be filmed to extend their educational reach. Over the years, a film genre was built up and then perfected during the Great Terror of the Stalinist era. In

3 Bruno Richard Hauptmann was tried in 1935, in a courtroom of Flemington, NJ, for the kidnapping and murder of the baby of the aviator Charles Lindbergh and his wife, Anne Morrow Lindbergh. The media reporting of the trial was considered a peak of intrusiveness, sensationalism, and disruptiveness. The American Bar Association (ABA) described the press coverage of the Hauptmann trial as "the most spectacular and depressing example of improper publicity and professional misconduct ever presented to the people of the United States." It led to a nationwide prohibition on the photographic coverage of judicial proceedings, see Stepniak 2008, 73–78.

this case, filmmakers played the role of auxiliaries of justice in courtrooms. Their cameras were visible, just like the powerful lights set up in front of the dock and facing the public. This set-up was not designed in the interests of transparency. On the contrary, the filmmaking was as much a part of the show as the spectators themselves. The film crew exerted a power over the accused that could clearly be seen in their faces and bodies: the lights were forcefully focused on the accused, scrutinizing them relentlessly. The strong lights also swept over the rows of the public, who were called on to support the opinions of the prosecutor and to applaud the sentences.

After the Great Terror came the war. In December 1943, Soviet justice organized the very first trial of Nazi criminals. It was held in the theater of the city of Kharkov, which had just been taken back from the enemy. Three German officers, together with a Russian accomplice, were judged by the military tribunal of the Fourth Ukrainian Front. They were sentenced to death and hanged publicly, with a crowd 40,000 strong watching. The trial was filmed by director Ilya Kopalin's cameramen, and in his documentary *Sud idet* (The court is in session, USSR, 1943), the main topoi of the genre can be seen: the courtroom is transformed into a film set; the dramatic composition is built on the confessions of the accused; the camera angles amplify the power of the president and prosecutor of the court; both the press and the public are recorded at length. But what is most memorable about *Sud idet* are the scenes of hanging, which form the climax of the film: below the four sets of gallows, an electrified crowd communes in savage, archaic revels as the guilty are punished.

In May 1945, Jackson obtained a copy of *Sud idet*. It made a considerable impression on the members of his team, and the quality and expressivity of the film may well have weighed on the American decision to record the trial. But the US prosecutor was haunted by the memories of the Hauptmann trial. He was fiercely determined to prevent the judgments pronounced on Nazi leaders from creating an uproar in the media. His British counterparts had only very reluctantly agreed to the principle of filming the trial—another reason to avoid any upheaval.

In Jackson's view, Nuremberg was an international stage on which the Americans could showcase the virtues of their democratic system of justice. He thus had to find the ideal balance between the principles of publicizing the future trial and its fairness. To ensure that the deliberations were conducted with dignity, he refused to allow the cameramen to position themselves wherever they chose in the courtroom. They would be placed in booths, behind soundproof glass, and would not be allowed to leave their places. Forbidden to move, the cameramen were also deprived of light and this left them subject to the goodwill of the presiding judge, Sir



Figure 12.1. The Kharkov (today Kharkiv) trial in the city theater.



Figure 12.2. The hangings at Kharkov.

Geoffrey Lawrence, from the United Kingdom. To facilitate shooting, powerful spotlights were affixed to the ceiling, but the British judge demanded that the cameramen ask permission to switch them on. They blinded the protagonists and overheated the courtroom. Lawrence's decision gave him formidable sway over the task of filming, and all through the trial he exercised his power, often having the spotlights switched off at the most intense moments of the debates.

Conditions in Dachau were very different. There, the Americans had made no plans to film the trials, and in fact the military tribunal of the Third Army was severely lacking in resources. Denson could only envy the means at the disposal of his counterpart Jackson. At Nuremberg, in addition to being filmed, the proceedings were recorded in their entirety on audio disks. The International Military Tribunal (IMT) also had at their disposal a team of strictly screened interpreters and a sophisticated system of translation. The conditions of this major trial, conducted in four languages, laid the veritable foundations of simultaneous interpretation.

Nothing of the sort was to be seen at Dachau. The interpreters, seated at the podium next to the orators, gave consecutive translations of what was said, thus doubling the time of the hearings. What's more, since these interpreters were by no means experienced professionals, their translations left much to be desired. The task the court had to undertake was hindered even further by the dozen languages the witnesses used. The tribunal often found itself plunged into a linguistic fog that was highly detrimental to the impartiality of justice.

Although no plans to film the Dachau trial were made ahead of time, nor even thought of, a team from the Signal Corps as well as cameramen from *Welt im Film*, the German newsreel established by the British and Americans in their zones of occupation, did actually film some hearings.

Let us take the example of the images of the Malmedy trial (May 16–July 16, 1946), recorded by the cameramen of the Signal Corps. Powerful free-standing floodlights were installed in the courtroom. Added to their blinding light were the flashes of the photographers, banned at Nuremberg. Two cameras filmed the proceedings, one at the back of the courtroom and the other on the podium, in full sight of all present. This arrangement meant that the cameramen could show in close-up some protagonists, pan out or use the shot-counter shot technique for exchanges between court and counsel to follow the movements of the prosecutors and lawyers—unlike their counterparts at Nuremberg, they were not confined to their desks. At Dachau, the cameramen and photographers strove to emphasize the staging of the testimonies, heightening their dramatic intensity with their images. This



Figure 12.3. Lieutenant Lary repeating his pointing gesture for the photographers.

was the case when Lieutenant Lary gave his testimony. The prosecutor asked the witness to identify one of the Malmedy riflemen in the dock. When the American officer rose from his chair to make his way to the benches where the seventy-three accused, each bearing a numbered label around his neck, were sitting, the cameras followed his moves. Once he reached the edge of the dock, Lary extended his arm to point to SS Georg Fleps, who immediately stood up. But the head of a member of the defense team was in the way of the photographers, obstructing Lary's hand.<sup>4</sup> Lary beamed at them and repeated the scene twice more—this time, with the cameras flashing. The first gesture had been entirely spontaneous; those that followed were frozen into a deliberate pose using a theatricality that made for a harder-hitting truth.

The scene that took place at the Dachau trial may be compared to one filmed at Nuremberg on November 30, 1945, when General Lahousen, the first witness for the prosecution, testified. The evidence of this Austrian officer, who had begun working for the Abwehr under the orders of Admiral Canaris, was eagerly awaited. It would be prejudicial to several of the accused by pinpointing their responsibility in the murder of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war. When the questioning began, US Colonel Amen asked Lahousen to point out three of

4 Hearing of May 20, 1946.



Figure 12.4. General Lahousen giving his testimony.



Figure 12.5. General Lahousen giving his testimony.

the accused in the dock: Ribbentrop, Jodl, and Keitel. Three times the witness, seated at the stand, gestured toward them with his arm as he answered the question. Three times the Signal Corps remained focused on Lahousen. Not once did the cameraman try to follow the witness's gesture by panning out towards the dock to seek out the faces of the three accused, as most of those observing the trial did—just see the image of the Russian stenographer, who lifted his eyes from his paper, looking at Lahousen's arm and turning his gaze towards the accused as though following the trajectory of a ball.

At Nuremberg, the neutrality in the filming that Jackson was determined to have and that the Signal Corp affirmed they adhere to verged on passivity. With the camera fixed, part of the action was relegated off-camera, leaving spectators frustrated in their wish to see what was happening. The American military filmmakers, confined to their bubble-like glass booths, paid little attention to the details of the courtroom, where the asceticism and rigor of the shooting stood in stark contrast with the scenography in motion created in Dachau.

It was not only the constraints imposed by the Nuremberg tribunal that were responsible for this difference. The Soviet team directed by the director Roman Karmen, which was filming at the same time, proved to be inventive and skillful and overcame these restrictions. The Russians vacillated between their constant preoccupation of commitment to the genre and the need to innovate so that they could faithfully report a trial over whose codes and course they had no control. The Soviet filming displays great coherence; they strove to render the dynamic of the arguments and to plunge the public into the vibrant heart of the debates. But its fine quality also derived from the way in which Karmen's team unhesitatingly fictionalized reality by shooting the Soviet journalists and illustrators at work on the fringe of the trial during the breaks; moreover, they had the USSR prosecutors replay some parts of the trials when the courtroom was empty.<sup>5</sup> The difference did not only lie in the technical issues. Distinct philosophies of justice become apparent when Nuremberg and Dachau are compared. The intention of the US at the International Military Tribunal was to showcase a model of justice that was in line with their democratic ideals. However, they also had to make concessions to their British counterparts, whose preoccupation was that justice remain dignified. This meant they were reluctant for the trials to be turned into any form of spectacle.

On October 1, 1946, when the time came for judgment, Lawrence, the president of the court, intent on shielding this highly dramatic moment

5 As showed in Barbat 2018.





Figure 12.6. Lieutenant Christ hearing his death sentence.



Figure 12.7.  
Lieutenant Christ  
hearing his death  
sentence.

of the trial from the eager eyes of the public, forbade the filming of the pronouncement of the sentences. To the great displeasure of the Soviets, the British also demanded that the executions of the Nazi leaders not be filmed. In the opinion of the British, such footage might well trigger morbid impulses among the public or even produce martyrs. These compromises with the British both enabled and hindered the recording of the debates:

they certainly preserved the reputation of the Nuremberg trial, but they imposed restrictions on how images would transmit its memory.

In Dachau, however, the American tribunal allowed the Signal Corps and newsreel cameramen to film the final moments of the trial. At the Malmedy judgment, seventy-three of the seventy-four accused were pronounced guilty and forty-three death sentences handed down under the eye of the cameras.

In July 1946, the Signal Corps cameramen, stationed in the center of the courtroom, focused their lights and cameras on the accused. One after another, their bodies stiff and faces expressionless, they identified themselves to the court to hear their sentences uttered by the military judge.

The ambitions of the Americans were less far-reaching at Dachau than at Nuremberg. The brutal murderers with their blood-stained hands were treated with less deference than the high ranking, major Nazi war criminals. The former were delivered as fodder to the media, while the latter were shielded from the indiscreet gaze of the world behind the closed doors of the courtroom.

The American army also went ahead with filming the executions of the guilty when they were hanged in the Landsburg and Bruchsal prisons.

The images of Dachau were produced in conditions where American military justice was less concerned than at Nuremberg with extolling its virtues for the world to see. At the Malmedy trial, the principles of judiciary ethics suffered, and a spirit of revenge whittled away the rights of the defense. In fact, the conditions in which the sentences were handed out were criticized in both the US and in Germany; sentences were finally commuted or reduced by commissions of review established by Lucius Clay, then military governor of the American Zone of Occupation. In 1949, the US Senate set up a subcommittee to examine the treatment to which the accused had been subjected during their interrogations.

Unlike the images from Nuremberg, widely distributed worldwide, those of the Malmedy trial were mainly shown in the US and in Germany through *Welt im Film*. The newsreel cameramen also covered key moments of the other trials held before the American tribunal. A report issued by the Information Control Branch reports on the reaction of the German spectators who viewed footage of the pronouncement of the sentences of the first trials at Dachau in December 1945.<sup>6</sup> The reporter notes how

6 Report of January 30, 1946, by the Information Control Branch on the reactions to the newsreel *Welt im Film* of December 21, 1945, RG 260 E A1 260 Box 290. The report concerning Dachau was published in the newspaper on December 21, 1945; it was entitled "Dachauer Prozess: Das Urteil" ("The Dachau trial: The verdict").



Figure 12.8. Hanging at Bruchsal, January 12, 1946.

passionately interested they were, in contrast with their lack of interest for any coverage of Nuremberg.

Writing about the viewing of the Dachau footage, the author describes how the spectators felt it was breathtaking and were overwhelmed by “morbid excitement,” so satisfied were they with the death sentences. To explain why, he noted, first of all, that filming techniques at Dachau were more sophisticated than those at Nuremberg; in addition, there was more emphasis on the individual sentences of each of the accused. The Dachau trials dealt with concrete acts of crime, such as murder and torture that could be directly imputed to the accused, unlike the “crimes in principle” that were judged at Nuremberg. He concludes by saying that the Dachau trial awakened morbid spectator curiosity towards the accused, whom the public considered to be common law criminals, monsters with blood on their hands. They could by no means identify with such individuals. According to the report, the major trial at Nuremberg, on the other hand, awakened the general question of the collective guilt of the German people.

Comparison of the Dachau and Nuremberg trials sheds light on the status of images of justice, filmed at a juncture where judicial issues—examining proof and determining sentences—converged in ways hitherto unseen with extrajudicial issues that went beyond the individual fate of each of the accused to achieve purposes of pedagogy, politics, and memory. More

than a reflection of the events themselves, the images filmed are archives of ways of filming. The images of Dachau and Nuremberg testify to rival cultures of cinema and judicial traditions that came into play when the Nazi criminals were judged. They bear the mark of the philosophies of law and justice that came face to face in the courtrooms of occupied Germany. Filming trials and defining the role and need for transitional justice was a widespread endeavor, both at a transnational and national level. In fact, these images illustrate the philosophies of law underpinning respective trials, illuminate by narratives the reasons for extraordinary courts, and design a new, collective memory in bestowing accountabilities and penalties. While the filming at Nuremberg and Dachau epitomizes alternative strategies for staging trials for the camera, the Italian example we shall linger on in the following section incarnates how narratives match political rationale and well illustrates the complex national and transnational relationships originating in the production itself.

### *Giorni di gloria* and the Portrayal of Transitional Justice in Italy

Italy is a peculiar case with regard to transitional justice and memory building in the postwar era. In fact, Italy was the first totalitarian regime in interwar Europe, which benefited from a huge popular support until war broke out. Fascist Italy was the chief political and military ally of the Third Reich and carried out an aggressive colonial politics in Eastern Africa and in the Balkan region and approved racial laws. However, Italy also signed an armistice as soon as the Allies invaded Sicily (September 1943), since the fall of Mussolini (July 1943) saw a significant Resistance movement operating and the country experienced a brutal Nazi–Fascist occupation on its soil, as war between Wehrmacht and Allied forces ravaged the country and cut it into two distinct areas. This controversial past and the civic religion of the Resistance, which was brought about in the postwar era, led to another chapter of what English historian John Foot termed “Italy’s divided memory” (2009, 125–82; see also Focardi 2005): an official one, which magnified anti-Fascism, the sufferance of the population under Nazi rule, and the humanity and solidarity of Italians at home and abroad, while pointing the finger at German ruthlessness (Focardi 2013; Fogu 2006); and an informal one, which was less keen on democracy and the Allied presence. Both memories were at odds with acknowledging past popular support of Fascist rule.

This reluctance to reconsider national involvement with totalitarianism, colonialism, and warfare is recurrently mirrored in postwar documentaries,

which trace a time map (Zerubavel 2003) that was totally forgetful of whatever preceded the armistice that had drawn Italy out of the Axis. Films such as *Giorni di gloria* (Days of glory, dir. Mario Serandrei, Luchino Visconti, Giuseppe De Santis, and Marcello Pagliero, IT, 1945), *Aldo dice 26 x 1* (Aldo says 26 x 1, dir. Fernando Cerchio, IT, 1946), and *L'Italia s'è desta* (Italy awoke, dir. Domenico Paolella, IT, 1947) start narratives from September 1943, or even later, thus relegating into an obscure past all grounds and national accountability for warfare and ensuing Resistance (Pitassio 2017).

The Italian controversial past echoed in a controversial present. In fact, unlike most European countries experiencing Nazi occupation, Italy never brought to a similar conclusion a trial which might resemble, on a national level, the Nuremberg trials. This omission happened despite the fact that the Wehrmacht and SS troops, with the cooperation of Fascist militias, perpetrated numerous massacres of civilians in Central and Northern Italy (Fulveti and Pezzino 2016). Consequently, Italy experienced what historian Michele Battini explicitly named the “missing Italian Nuremberg,” by bringing to court most prominent German military ranks, including Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, but then commuting sentences to penalties more favorable to defendants (Battini 2007). The highest Italian military ranks and Fascist big shots met a similar benign fate in courts. Very few defendants were sentenced to harsh penalties, while most of them, including Generals Mario Roatta and Rodolfo Graziani, responsible for genocidal actions in the Balkans, Libya, and Ethiopia, were acquitted or released in a short time. Such a sympathetic attitude towards perpetrators was at odds with the foundations of the newborn democracy. Accordingly, postwar documentary cinema and newsreels completely overlook inconvenient personalities and events, as if they never existed. In fact, courts, either local and closely connected with Resistance officials, or national and strictly dependent from judiciary hierarchies, attempted to enforce the law, while matching a widespread popular demand for justice and, often, revenge for the hardships and grievance the population had gone through during the Italian Civil War (1943–45). Italian society and notably Central and Northern Italy experienced a wave of ruthless purges, which prolonged the role of political violence within Italian society in the war's aftermath, and thousands of people were killed in extrajudicial procedures (Dondi 2008). Conversely, courts attempted to regulate this phenomenon and administer justice for past crimes. It is against this backdrop that *Days of Glory* was produced. The film brought together different institutions, such as the Ministry for Occupied Italy, whose director, communist Mauro Scoccimarro, was also adjunct high commissioner for epuration. Beyond this

institution, the opening credits of the film acknowledge the cooperation of the film division of the Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB), which was a joint military–civilian Anglo-American psychological warfare unit, the communist Garibaldi Divisions in the Valsesia area of Piedmont, belonging to the Resistance, and the Swiss newsreel company Cinéac, based in Lausanne; moreover, the titles name many cinematographers, Italian and not, and technicians belonging to the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN, National Liberation Committee). This latter was the political representative of the Italian Resistance to Nazi occupation and brought together different political forces opposing Fascism. The film was released, but not produced by Titanus, as contemporary documents certify (Levi 1945; Calvino 1945; Amendola and Lombardo 1945). To summarize, the film was born when Italy was still split in two and civil war ravaged. It came into being under an institutional aegis which saw the cooperation of Allied forces, the national administration, and the Resistance.

Altogether, *Days of Glory* celebrates the Italian Resistance: its narrative starts with the armistice and the collapse of Fascist rule, recapitulates the Nazi occupation and the war on the national soil, and concludes with the liberation of Northern Italy and images of a glorious future. The images are highly heterogeneous and the film, in contemporary documents, is often referred to as a “political feature film” (Sottosegretario di Stato 1954). In fact, the film brings together four different kinds of images: documentary footage produced by PWB, staged newsreels, re-enactments, and documentary footage produced for the film itself (Musumeci 2000). Accordingly, the film is midway between a compilation film (Leyda 1964; Beattie 2004, 125–45), a re-enactment, and a rendition of events recorded live. Furthermore, we should not underestimate the role of transnational documentary and media culture. As a matter of fact, the voice-of-God guiding the audience across the variety of footage is that of Umberto Calosso, who spoke to the Italian population during the war for Radio London, the radio broadcast of the BBC aimed at Nazi/Fascist-ruled Italy. Moreover, the role of PWB in the production indicates that Italian filmmakers were exposed, at the least, to footage and practices that exceeded national boundaries. This might refer either to archival footage or imply live recorded sequences as well. In fact, within the holdings of the Luce archives are three *Combat Films*, produced under the aegis of US forces and originally stored at the National Archives in Washington, DC, whose footage partly coincides with that of *Days of Glory*. This coincidence illustrates the close cooperation between PWB, partisans, and the ruling administration. Moreover, this material also questions the authors of the footage, whom the opening credits identify as

Marcello Pagliero and Luchino Visconti as the only persons responsible for shooting the sequences at the Ardeatine Caves and the Caruso trial.<sup>7</sup> In fact, who did shoot this footage? PWB cameramen alone, and then Visconti and Pagliero edited the footage? Or did PWB sponsor the initiative of the two filmmakers and then used the footage for its *Combat Films*?

As many commentators have remarked (Musumeci 2000; Pucci 2013; Antichi and Tassinari 2020), one event occupies center stage of *Days of Glory*: the massacre of the Ardeatine Caves, a location on the outskirts of Rome, where on March 24, 1944, Nazi occupying forces, with the help of Italian police, slaughtered 335 people abducted from the Gestapo detention center in Via Tasso, Rome's main prison Regina Coeli, or arrested in the area of Via Rasella. The latter was the place where partisans had attacked the Polizeiregiment Bozen the day before, leaving thirty-three soldiers on the ground and causing the abominable retaliation. Since the days immediately following the massacre, the events generated alternative memories in Italy: one that blamed partisans for unleashing German legitimated vengeance and being too cowardly to turn themselves in, leaving innocents defenseless against Nazi rage; and another that claimed the attack as part and parcel of a war against an occupying force and retaliation against the population as an ominous act, perpetrated without any warning. Historically speaking, the latter version is the accurate one; but memory does not rely on accuracy (Portelli 1999). While not the hugest slaughter that Nazis perpetrated in Italy in terms of casualties, the Ardeatine Caves epitomized most of them for the location (the capital) and for the many social classes that the victims belonged to.

*Days of Glory* narrates the event in three chapters, which are at the core of the film. The first section, through a voice-over, associates the location

7 See *Il massacro delle Ardeatine* (The Ardeatine massacre, 1944, RW289), [https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000049536/2/il-massacro-ardeatine-111-adc-2856.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:\[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000049536/2/il-massacro-ardeatine-111-adc-2856.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}); *Scene varie dalla campagna d'Italia* (Various scenes from the campaign in Italy, 1944, RW452), [https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000041474/2/scene-varie-della-campagna-d-italia-111-adc-1463.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:\[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000041474/2/scene-varie-della-campagna-d-italia-111-adc-1463.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}); *L'esecuzione di Caruso* (Caruso's execution, 1944, RW290), [https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000049547/2/l-esecuzione-caruso-111-adc-2860.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:\[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000049547/2/l-esecuzione-caruso-111-adc-2860.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}). Mario Musumeci, who oversaw the restoration of the film (Musumeci 1998), suggests that the materials of the PWB, as much as the technical resources both PWB and CLN provided, testify to a close and consistent cooperation between Allied forces and partisans in this endeavor (Private correspondence, February 19, 2022). We are very thankful to the generous cooperation of Mario Musumeci.

with renowned concentration and extermination camps in Europe; then it moves the camera throughout the site of the massacre, to finally discover the decomposing corpses of the victims, as Allied forces found them when liberating Rome two months afterwards. Then the film, through print materials and still photos, describes a previous partisan attack in Via Rasella, to go back to the exhumation of the corpses. The second section describes the trial of the Rome police chief Pietro Caruso and later his execution, in Forte Bravetta, on the outskirts of Rome. The third part renders the burial of the victims and the mass celebrated to honor them.

Regarding the trial, *Days of Glory* illustrates the logics underpinning transitional justice, that is, its political motivation, its administration on behalf of the people as a legitimate form of justice as opposed to spontaneous violence, and its memorial function.

In terms of *political motivation*, the film illustrates the events of the Ardeatine Caves as an abominable act of retaliation taking place without any warning, by citing the first page of newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia*, which published the German Command official notice on March 25, stating that a retaliation had *already* happened, as a direct consequence of the partisan attack. Therefore, the film explicitly counters the narrative blaming partisans for the massacre, which might have not taken place had they turned themselves in. Accordingly, it is the Nazis and their collaborators who are accountable for it and motivate transitional justice. In terms of its administration, the film identifies Pietro Caruso and depicts his trial, together with his collaborator Roberto Occhetto. Luchino Visconti is credited for the shooting, which made use of seven or eight cameras and PWB personnel. The trial is split into two sections: one focuses on the Palazzo di Giustizia (Palace of Justice), where the trial could not take place. The audience identified the director of Rome's prison, Donato Caretta, and the mob lynched him. The images edited record the aggression, but not its tragic ending. The other section records the trial which, after the brutal lynching, moved to Palazzo Corsini alla Lungara and was held on September 20, 1944. The images of the corpses of the victims are interpolated with those of the defendants, judges, and attorneys, when the prosecutor, Mario Berlinguer, evokes the moral abomination of the crime. Finally, after the reading of the sentence, which condemns Caruso to execution and Occhetto to thirty years of imprisonment, a montage sequence, with calendar dates sliding, shows a series of executions: firstly Caruso (September 23, 1944),<sup>8</sup> then an informer, Federico Scarpato (April 27, 1945), and finally soldier and torturer Pietro

8 Records state that the execution happened immediately after the trial, i.e., on September 21.





Figure 12.9. Transitional justice as lynching. Still from *Giorni di gloria* (Days of glory, dir. Mario Serandrei, Luchino Visconti, Giuseppe De Santis, and Marcello Pagliero, IT, 1945).



Figure 12.10. Transitional justice as trial. Still from *Giorni di gloria* (Days of glory, dir. Mario Serandrei, Luchino Visconti, Giuseppe De Santis, and Marcello Pagliero, IT, 1945).

Koch. Koch and his crew had a significant role in countering Italian resistance in Rome and in this capacity he arrested and subsequently detained Visconti, too, in one of the venues he returned to for his anti-partisan activity, in April 1944. Visconti was released thanks to the intercession of Italian star Maria Denis, and later testified at the trial against Koch. For *Days of Glory*, then, Visconti filmed Koch's execution (June 5, 1945) that concludes the montage sequence. All executions record graphically the effects of the firing squads and display rather gruesome images.

In terms of illustrating the *administration of transitional justice*, the film opposes spontaneous, uncontrollable justice, which the people enforce on Donato Carretta by lynching him, to the holding of a proper trial. Accordingly, the film articulates the need for courts and judges to represent a widespread sense of justice, while preventing its brutal and disproportionate application—as a matter of fact, Carretta was innocent and was attending the trial as a witness for the prosecution. Moreover, the trial associates the attorney's harangue with the corpses of the helpless victims butchered in the caves, thus motivating the strict penalties requested and the ensuing execution. Finally, the film relates the execution of Caruso to those of Scarpato and Koch, who contributed at selecting the persons to be later executed at the Ardeatine Caves. All three executions fall into one category: collaborationism, which purge, notably according to partisans, should repress with the most severe penalty. One should not underestimate the fact that the three executions happened at very different times and were the outcome of non-related trials, but all exemplify the need for political cleansing. Later newsreels celebrate regular trials for those German responsible for the slaughter, and just a dramatized voice-over echoes the voices of the victims' families, addressing the defendants as "Assassins! Assassins!"<sup>9</sup>

In terms of *memorial function*, the film places at the center of its narratives the victims of the Ardeatine Caves. The opening credits dedicate the film to those who suffered and fought Nazi–Fascist oppression and the 335 slaughtered in the Ardeatine Caves epitomize them. The shocking images of decomposing corpses, which Marcello Pagliero filmed, are part and parcel of a political use of dead bodies which Nazi occupiers put in place, which then partisans reversed at the end of the war—the most renowned case being that of the

9 See *Tribunale militare. Kappler davanti alla giustizia* (Military Court: Kappler before justice, *La settimana Incom*, no. 151, IT, May 5, 1948), [https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000008554/2/tribunale-militare-kappler-davanti-alla-giustizia.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:\[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000008554/2/tribunale-militare-kappler-davanti-alla-giustizia.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}).

corpses of Mussolini, Petacci, and other Fascist officials hung upside-down in Piazzale Loreto, in Milan, in the same place where previously partisans had been executed and exhibited (Luzzatto 1998). It is the final chapter of a liturgy revolving around bodies and corpses, pivotal during the Italian Civil War and during its immediate aftermath (Schwarz 2010), which blatantly incarnates the violence ravaging the country (Ciammaroni 2012). Accordingly, the Ardeatine Caves corpses first act as a sign of Nazi violence, but then have to rest in peace in order for a new society to arise. This is what happens after executions take place, when a mass is celebrated and families and authorities gather to remember the victims. It is an anthropological and religious function, whose meaning is quite explicit, and is also echoed in the *Combat Films* footage.<sup>10</sup> This celebration will be repeated in the following years and regularly recorded, almost in the same way, for the national newsreels *La settimana Incom*.<sup>11</sup>

The role *Days of Glory* performs in support of transitional justice is best exemplified by its reflexivity, in showing the presence of a film crew at the scene of the execution. A reflexivity which the *Combat Films* footage confirms, by showing as the *Days of Glory* film crew on the scene, but also recording the execution from different angles and distances, while implicitly confirming the relevance and theatricality of the event, shot by multiple cameras.<sup>12</sup> As Lara Pucci claims,

In looking at the camera looking, the spectator is reminded of the camera's activity of making visible, of their own activity of seeing, and of their shared scopic responsibility. The heightened indexical performativity

10 See *Various scenes from the campaign in Italy*, where a monk kneels down above the caves and beside a huge iron cross.

11 See *Onoranze ai martiri delle "Ardeatine"* (Homage to the martyrs of the Ardeatine, *La settimana Incom*, no. 269, IT, March 30, 1949), [https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000012436/2/roma-alla-presenza-de-gaspero-e-altri-membri-del-governo-inaugurazione-del-mausoleo-dedicato-alle-vittime-fosse-ardeatine.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:\[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000012436/2/roma-alla-presenza-de-gaspero-e-altri-membri-del-governo-inaugurazione-del-mausoleo-dedicato-alle-vittime-fosse-ardeatine.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}); *Sei anni dopo, dalle Ardeatine a Buchenwald* (Six years afterwards, from Ardeatine to Buchenwald, *La settimana Incom*, no. 422, IT, March 30, 1950), [https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000015017/2/sei-anni-dopo-dalle-ardeatine-buchenwald.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:\[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000015017/2/sei-anni-dopo-dalle-ardeatine-buchenwald.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}); *Nel 9° anniversario delle Fosse Ardeatine* (On the ninth anniversary of the Ardeatine Caves, *La settimana Incom*, no. 923, IT, March 27, 1953), [https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000025791/2/pellegrinaggio-della-cittadinanza-roma-alle-fosse-ardeatine-sul-luogo-della-strage-alla-presenza-parenti-vittime-celebrati-riti.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:\[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22\\_perPage%22:20}}](https://patrimonio.archivioluice.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000025791/2/pellegrinaggio-della-cittadinanza-roma-alle-fosse-ardeatine-sul-luogo-della-strage-alla-presenza-parenti-vittime-celebrati-riti.html?startPage=0&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:%22query%22:[%22fosse%20ardeatine%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}).

12 See *L'esecuzione di Caruso*.

of the footage of Caruso's execution is paralleled by the circumstances of his trial, which took place in September 1944, just three months after the liberation of Rome. It was the first to take place in Italy's High Court, created earlier that year. [...] The fact that Luchino Visconti—already an established director—was commissioned by the Allied Psychological Warfare Branch to film Caruso's trial confirms this performative drive to make justice visible and public. (2013, 361)<sup>13</sup>

In aligning the gaze of the camera, that of the audience, and that of the firing squad, the camera not only bears witness, but associates (and asks its audience to comply with such a choice) with the administration of transitional justice. This visual strategy bestows on the audience a political responsibility within a democratic state, which makes transparent its decision-making process (Sarat et al. 2014).

It is exactly this alignment with transitional justice and its political meaning that became controversial for the administration within a matter of few years. When a committee celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Liberation of Venice required it for public screening, the administration considered *Days of Glory* potentially subversive (Biondo 1954; Ermini 1954). The transition had been completed, spontaneous violence or resistance were now out of question, as was the imperfect national epuration. Documentary cinema was not required, anymore, to perform this political function.

## Conclusions

To summarize, whatever the countries, political concerns affected postwar justice; their main task was reconstituting international and national communities by representing a frequently haunted version of the past. Non-fiction cinema largely contributed to spreading this narrative among the population.

Regarding the staging and filming of trials, differences emerge, originating in the philosophies of law underpinning the trials as much as their cinematic rendering. Such discrepancies can be traced not only between Soviet and Western Allied non-fiction films, but also within the Allied recordings of different trials, as the Nuremberg and Dachau examples epitomize.

With regard to purges, the United States also took recourse to the images depicting wild purge shot in Italy as a motivation for the judgment of major

13 I am greatly indebted to this work also with regard to the scrutiny on the role of the corpses within the film representational and narrative strategy.

Nazi criminals, instead of executing them without a trial in its own right. For instance, this is exactly the case of the early version of the sort *That Justice Be Done* (dir. Ray Kellogg, US, 1945). The Field Photographic Branch conceived of it during the summer of 1945, with the task of changing American opinion, at the time still largely in favor of the need for extrajudicial killing of Nazi elites. To do so, Ford's group used the images of the body of Il Duce hung by his feet in front of a hysterical mob.<sup>14</sup> Over these images, the narrator states, the IMT prosecutors "will not content themselves with dragging a tyrant by his heels—but to lay bare the ugly core of his evil designs, the retrogressive blueprint for seizing power, smashing opposition and waging illegal war."

But the sequence was reedited at Jackson's request, as he was reluctant to use these "gruesome" images.<sup>15</sup> In the script, the Field Photographic Branch also planned on using images of Donato Caretta, lynched by the mob on the day he was called to testify at the Caruso trial.<sup>16</sup> However, these two Italian sequences were integrated into *Guilty Men* (US, 1945) a short film made for the American troops by the US Army Signal Corps. This documentary also deals with the European trials and the IMT's mandate, and it also aims to justify recourse to the law against the havoc brought about by revenge and lynching.

In the end, therefore, Italian and American non-fiction films made similar use of the images of wild purge to legitimize the policies implemented by postwar administrations, while hailing a new, democratic justice, enforced by the rules of the law. No matter how imperfect or fallacious transitional justice may be, it was undoubtedly the most viable and civil option available. Non-fiction cinema could lend a hand in clarifying its role to both the European and the American population, to the benefit of the new rule of the world.

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14 Mussolini, and his mistress, Claretta Petacci, were shot close to Lake of Como before their bodies were taken to Milan and exposed on Piazzale Loreto.

15 Robert Jackson, diary (kept April 27–November 19, 1945), entry dated September 6, 1945, Library of Congress, Robert H. Jackson Papers, B 95, F 5. See Lindeperg, 87–93.

16 See above.

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## 13. (De)constructing the Architect

Modern Architecture between Praise and Criticism in  
Postwar Non-fiction Cinema

*Perrine Val and Paolo Villa*

### Abstract

As a powerful tool for education, popularization, and criticism, post-war non-fiction cinema has often intertwined with architecture and urban planning, directly involving architects and planners as experts, commissioners, or protagonists in what could be called “architectural documentary.” In a time of major changes for European cities, the architect became a key public figure. Based on a comparison between French and Italian examples of such architectural documentaries, this chapter aims at analyzing the cinematographic representation of the architectural and urban renovation and of the architects themselves. “Deconstructing” the architects’ images allows to articulate the layers and transitions of the public discourses around architecture, while highlighting the role that cinema played in shaping these perceptions, swinging between celebration and criticism.

**Keywords:** reconstruction, modernism, urban planning, architectural documentary, France, Italy

### Introduction: The “Architectural Documentary”

In a famous 1949 article discussing the relationships between documentary cinema and the visual arts, Italian art historian Giulio Carlo Argan noted that “for urban planning studies (and urbanism is nothing but the most topical form of architecture), cinema is or should be an essential tool of analysis.” Leading to a “stratigraphic examination” of the city environment, cinema can represent its architectonic complexity, but also “the habits, the

tensions, the relations, and the contradictions that constitute the fabric of any urban center” (Argan 1949, 14). Writing in the midst of the massive postwar reconstruction that was changing the face of European cities, Argan promoted cinema as a designing tool alongside drawings, architectural models, photographs, a precious resource for all architects and city planners (to try) to translate their visions into reality.

At the core of what we can call the “architectural documentary” stands the intention to represent *an idea* of the city, *a vision* of architecture rather than simply its concrete achievements. “An idea is a solid fact, a theory is a solid fact,” wrote urban theoretician and sociologist Lewis Mumford in 1922, “as long as people continue to regulate their actions in terms of that idea or theory [...]; and it is none the less solid because it is conveyed as an image or a breath of sound” (Mumford 1997 [1922], 13). A position echoed a few decades later by architect Ludovico Quaroni, actively engaged with the film medium: architectural cinema should not represent the *visible*, rather the *possible*, supporting the designers to imagine new solutions and to reveal the inherent meanings of their projects. “The collaboration between a director, a critic, and an urban architect ought to try, with cinematic means, to create a film that should not denounce the existing reality but display a new project [...] that would be impossible to expose merely with words or traditional drawings” (Quaroni 1969, 81).

Seen as a designing tool, cinema should encourage disciplinary progress while bringing architecture and urbanism closer to the audience, popularizing both their concrete accomplishments and intellectual concepts. These films therefore aim at two target audiences (the lay audience and the experts) and may involve three different levels of meaning and purpose: a *documentarian impulse* to record the different stages of a project while being discussed, designed, and later realized; an *educational intent* to promote architectural progress, urban renovation and the designer’s role in society at large; a *critical stance*, at play in the most self-aware of these films and addressed mainly to fellow architects, urbanists, art historians and critics, politicians in charge of city development, intended to trigger, often in a polemical way, disciplinary advance or discussion (Trione 2014, 20–21).

Apart from a few glances to other countries, this contribution will focus on architecture documentaries and newsreels produced in Italy and France during the postwar decade, that saw an impressive production of art and architecture documentaries. These films were often sponsored by public agencies, like *Noisy-le-Sec, laboratoire de la reconstruction* or *Le Bosquet, un village renaît*, made by Paul de Roubaix for the Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l’Urbanisme (MRU, Ministry of Reconstruction and

Urban Development) in France, or *Uomini e case* in Italy, promoting the INA-Casa plan,<sup>1</sup> a governmental housing program. Cultural institutions sometimes produced films. Milan's Triennale commissioned short films for its renown exhibitions in both 1947 and 1954. They count among the most relevant architecture documentaries of that time, alongside others that will be discussed, namely those featuring Le Corbusier. In both countries, architects benefitted from the support of their respective governments, which relied on them to solve the housing shortage by encouraging innovative ways of building houses. Moreover, the scale of war destruction offered a unique opportunity to experiment with large-scale city schemes and architectural solutions that had remained just abstract plans up to that point.

We will consider films presenting the active involvement of architects or urban planners, whether they are the protagonists, (co)writers, (co)directors, or even commissioners. These films provide invaluable historical insight both on the evolution of architectural and urban planning and on the social role of architects as relevant figures of the postwar reconstruction. Documentaries made by and with architects, while presenting ideas and projects—already realized, under development, or still in abstract form—always cast a light on the designers' cultural functions. As Leonardo Ciacci explains in his book on urban planning and documentary cinema, “the ‘social’ figure of the urbanists, as well as the architects, is indivisible from that of a social actor charged of a much broader role than the mere technical function they are called to comply” (Ciacci 2001, 21). In a decade of such momentous transformations for European cities, architects assumed an emblematic role, also thanks to the polysemic attributes they combined. Partly intellectual and artist, partly craftsman and technician, partly sociologist and even politician, the designers gathered multiple facets and connected several different social spheres, to the point of claiming to be the ultimate “authors” of the city: an image—that of the architect-author—that drew on the legacy of the interwar modernist movement epitomized by masters like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and others, all still active in the postwar period and regarded as models.

However relevant, the architect also appeared as a controversial figure in public discourses. Historian Danièle Voldman recalls that although French architects sought to structure their profession in the interwar period, the professional Order of Architects was established only in 1940, under the

1 The acronym INA refers to the company overseeing the financial side of the reconstruction plan, the Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni (National Insurance Company).

Vichy regime (in Italy, the same happened in 1923). The Liberation and the ensuing reconstruction, therefore, constituted a crucial moment for architects, who wished to maintain their newly acquired recognition in order to obtain preeminence on construction sites and take precedence over other professions (urban planners, surveyors, engineers), while at the same time having to revise the members approved under Vichy<sup>2</sup> (Voldman 2020, 200). Moreover, despite the extent of the rebuilding work to be conducted, architects faced a doubly difficult competition, within their own profession and with other construction professionals, against whom they had to assert their authority—while having to cope with high expectations and sometimes harsh criticism. Images played a major role in this battle to establish and reinforce their public legitimacy.

Relations and connections between architecture and film date back to 1910s and ever since then have been generating fruitful “correspondences” tying architectural theory, art history, and cinema together (Keim and Schrödl 2015; Costa 2002). Particularly in Germany and France, but also in other countries, a remarkable production of documentaries on new cities, modern buildings, and “liberated living” (Giedion 1929) had already developed during the 1920s and 1930s, setting the coordinates for the “architectural documentary” subgenre (Elsaesser 2005a; Ziegler 2003). Examining their postwar counterparts therefore means facing the complex, at times contradictory relations that post-WWII architecture and urbanism had with their prewar models, a relation that emerges at best through the medium of film. The modern stood as an indisputable reference immediately after the war, but later evolved into a contested authority; it acted as the paradigm to both respect and overcome, in a tense relation.

This contribution aims to explore how cinema captured this transition by focusing on the architects’ images within these films, revealing the tension between the growing recognition they gained and the proportionately large amount of criticism they faced. “Deconstructing” the architects’ film images allows us not only to articulate the layers and transitions of the public perceptions and discourses around architecture and urban planning, but also highlights the crucial role of cinema in shaping and negotiating these perceptions and discourses, swinging between gentle presentations and vehement opposition, between celebration and criticism.

2 The few architects who had been temporarily excluded from the Order of Architects because of their collaboration with the Nazis were reinstated very quickly, as early as 1947 or in 1951 at the latest.

## Gently Imposing the Architect: Model Districts and Rural Villages

Postwar films featuring architects, even though continuing in the wake of their prewar predecessors, also depart from them by adopting a more pragmatic discourse. Above all, they emphasize how the architects place themselves at the service of the community and how they participate in the reconstruction effort, becoming one of its structuring pillars. The films produced for the Milan Triennale and by the French MRU shared this goal. Through the medium of film, the Italian and the French institutions aimed to reach a wider audience than their usual interlocutors, that is, professionals in architecture and city management.

The recurring Triennale exhibitions in Milan soon became relevant occasions to take account of the architectural situation in Italy and abroad, promoting exchanges among different national cultures. Started in 1923, from 1933 hosted in Giovanni Muzio's rationalist, expressly built Palazzo dell'Arte with its surrounding park, these international exhibitions of industrial arts and architecture were (and still are) held every three years, hence the name "Triennale," designating both the event and its organizing institution. After the break caused by WWII, the eighth Triennale in 1947 was curated by architect Piero Bottoni, on the topical problem of "the house for everyone." Instead of merely presenting prototypes of popular houses to be dismantled after the exhibition's end, Bottoni opted for building a permanent quartier in the northwestern outskirts of Milan (where the municipality had made available a rural area), thus realizing a project he had been envisioning since 1933. Taking inspiration from interwar experimental quarters like Stuttgart's Weissenhofsiedlung (1927), Bottoni acted as the project supervisor and coordinated a team of architects and urban planners. His QT8 (Quartiere Triennale 8, as the district was named) was meant to provide a model for the reconstruction of Italy's bombed and overcrowded cities. The edification, begun in January 1947, would end only in late 1948.

The entire process was filmed under the direction of Bottoni himself, helped by operator Piero Lamperti. It was not a novelty for the Milanese architect. In 1933, for the fifth Triennale, Bottoni had realized *Una giornata nella casa popolare* (A day in the popular house, dir. Piero Bottoni, IT, 1933), a thirty-minute documentary exposing the advantages of living in a modern apartment designed for a working-class family, according to functionalist principles. Belonging to the same generation of Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier, Bottoni shared their modernist credo, while being in contact with the Italian school of Rationalism. For *Una giornata*

*nella casa popolare*, he clearly took inspiration from the 1920s German documentaries made in Frankfurt by Paul Wolff under the supervision of Ernst May<sup>3</sup>—a sign of Bottoni's transnational contacts and culture, revisited in a personal way (Quaresima 2014, 62). The “before/after,” “healthy/unhealthy,” “old/modern” patterns, typical of architecture and urban planning films (Elsaesser 2005b, 389), also reconnect *Una giornata* to Hans Richter's *Die neue Wohnung* (The new apartment, CH, 1930) and Pierre Chenal's *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* (Architecture today, FR, 1930) (Ciacci 2001, 72), while the lighting, frame compositions, camera movements, and editing rhythm reveal the influence of German and Soviet avant-garde examples, perhaps thanks to Ubaldo Magnaghi, then a young operator who later became a key figure in Italian postwar documentary.

This stylistic liveliness completely disappears in the 1947–48 films, which look like clear, almost didactic explanations. Bottoni made two short movies from the raw reels, both silent and with explanatory intertitles. *Prefabbricazione al QT8* (Prefabrication at QT8, dir. Piero Bottoni, IT, 1947) describes in detail the montage operations of preconstructed components, according to several engineering methods. Much like prewar examples such as *Die Häuserfabrik der Stadt Frankfurt am Main* (The house-factories of Frankfurt am Main, GER, 1927) or *Bâtir* (Building, dir. Pierre Chenal, FR, 1930), but also to Marshall Plan films like *Somewhere to Live*,<sup>4</sup> the film, though purely technical and strictly descriptive, proves Bottoni's adhesion to the ideals of industrial architecture, conceived and produced in a series and on a large scale.

The more complex *Il quartiere sperimentale modello dell'ottava Triennale di Milano QT8* (The experimental district at the eighth Milan Triennale QT8, dir. Piero Bottoni, IT, 1947) documents all phases of the project. It opens showing some architects, including Bottoni, discussing the area's planning with maps, drawings, and *maquettes*, before proceeding to the operations on the construction site. It is worth noting that both films, unlike the 1933 documentary, represent the “new building” rather than the “new living.” Although realized for an exhibition about the “house for everyone,” they describe building techniques, planning innovations, and architectural progress, but not the modern life these new houses could offer and host.

3 *Neues Bauen in Frankfurt a.M.* (New building in Frankfurt a.M., GER, 1927), *Die Frankfurter Kleinstwohnung* (The tiny apartment in Frankfurt, GER, 1928), *Die Frankfurter Küche* (The kitchen in Frankfurt, GER, 1928), which Bottoni probably saw while participating at the CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne) in Frankfurt in 1929, where they were screened.

4 See Fritsche and Pohl, in this volume.

Tellingly, in its first twelve minutes—of a total of sixteen—this second film depicts a landscape transformation. The rural area “of shacks, fields, without any service or connection” appears fallow and unwelcoming at first, before being leveled, dug, divided into lots. Two rivers (Olona and Merlada) are diverted, trees are planted to create a park, while the new district literally arises from war ruins. The small hill that Bottoni placed as radiating center of the quartier, called “Monte Stella,” was assembled by transporting and accumulating tons of ruins still lying in other parts of the city.

However relevant the QT8 project was, and as much as Bottoni was a well-known architect in the professional scene, his name—or any other name—is never mentioned in the films. In the second half of the 1940s, despite the tasks entrusted to them, ordinary and even well-established architects in France and Italy alike still did not enjoy real visibility and popular legitimacy as leading figures of the reconstruction. At the same time the QT8 was being built, the French MRU initiated a similar experiment in Noisy-le-Sec, near Paris, a district bringing together houses designed by various architects from different countries around the world. This geographical origin is reflected in the designation of the houses, which were mostly named according to their designer’s country. The film *Noisy-le-Sec, le laboratoire de la reconstruction* (Noisy-le-Sec, laboratory of reconstruction, FR, 1948), reporting on this experience, does not mention the name of any architect who participated. This film is part of a 1945 series of short documentaries entitled *L’album cinématographique de la reconstruction* (The reconstruction film album, FR), commissioned by the MRU and produced by Paul de Roubaix with his production company *Je vois tout* (I See Everything). These films aimed to show the reactivity of the MRU, highlighting how fast it provided new living solutions. Despite the sometimes complicated shooting conditions (some construction sites are still difficult to access), these institutional films were carefully produced, with a great variety in the scale of images, dynamic editing, and the use of tracking and aerial shots. The short opening credits, where a sliding bracket reveals the contributors’ names, contribute to tying the films together into the series. In addition to highlighting the achievements of the MRU, the films also seek to explain to French viewers the missions that the MRU entrusted to architects and urban planners, as the Triennale exhibit did in Milan.

While *Noisy-le-Sec* does not mention nor show the architects, Bottoni’s documentaries indulge the designer at least *visually*, often placing him at the center of the frame and in the foreground, portrayed while contemplating and supervising the construction sites in the background. This visual and conceptual centrality of the architect reinforces his status as the “author”



of the reconstruction and official mediator with public institutions like the municipality or the state. In the last sequence, the urban planner stands beside the political authority (a prefect) delivering the keys to the new houses to war veterans, on October 23, 1948. Recalling similar scenes from Fascist newsreels, when the propaganda exploited the delivery of new houses to prove how much the regime cared for the unlucky and needy ones, these final images cast a new, this time problematic reference to prewar representations of popular housing programs, demonstrating the continuity of both visual patterns and sociopolitical structures. The recurring figure of the architect also serves as the viewer's double, as his gaze over the advancing development of the district mirrors the spectator's act of watching the film. Positioning the architect at the center of the frame and so making him visually the cornerstone of the project, the film metaphorically also puts the viewer, as citizen and final user of the urban space, at the center of the new town. Similarly, in the exhibit's rooms, a diorama illustrating the QT8 project allowed the visitors to stand and enjoy a view of the future quartier literally built around them.

Addressed primarily to fellow experts, it is unlikely that these films circulated beyond professional circles; they were probably screened only on a handful of occasions, like at the following 1951 Triennale (Ciacci 2001, 84). However, parts of them had a much wider circulation, as they were used in a *La settimana Incom* newsreel, issued on April 3, 1947. *Ricostruzione: aspettando la Triennale di Milano* (Reconstruction: Waiting for Milan's Triennale, IT, 1947) uses the scenes showing the designers discussing urban maps and architecture models. While advertising the upcoming international event, the newsreel contributes to making the urban planner a protagonist of the public scene.

The uncompromising modernity that characterizes these and other urban model quarters<sup>5</sup> were more convincing to the inhabitants of cities by ensuring a better quality of life, but seemed to be further removed from the concerns of rural municipalities, where the architect's action was regarded with more suspicion and even opposition. In *Le Bosquet, un village renaît*

5 We would like to mention just two other relevant cases. *Kierunek Nowa Huta* (Destination Nowa Huta, PL, 1951) is a Polish film by Andrzej Munk describing the planning of the model industrial town of Nowa Huta, a satellite city near Kraków. In the film, the architect is described as "an engineer of the human soul" for his capacity to shape not only space, but also people's social consciousness (Fadaei 2014). It's also a reference to Stalin, who used to refer to writers and cultural workers this way. *Koraci Grada* (City steps, SFRY, 1957) is a Yugoslavian documentary (directed by Branko Majer) on the Trnje district in Zagreb, Croatia, where Yugoslavian architects experimented with new housing models in the 1950s (Tolic 2012).



Figure 13.1. VIII Triennale of Milan, 1947. Diorama of QT8, painted by Marcello Nizzoli, set by Cesare Pea, Angelo Bianchetti, and Gian Luigi Giordani. © Triennale Milano—Archivi.

(*Le Bosquel, a village is reborn*, FR, 1947), Paul de Roubaix attempted to deactivate this opposition between the villagers and the experts in charge of the reconstruction. The village called *Le Bosquel* was almost completely destroyed in May 1940 during the German offensive. In 1941, the architect Paul Dufournet, interested in rural reconstruction, proposed to make it a “model village.” His ambition was to modernize the village in a rather radical way, dividing it into three distinct zones, split into concentric circles: the heart of the village with the school, the town hall, and the church, then the agricultural farms and finally the cultivated land outside the village.

De Roubaix’s film was shot at a turning point in this project: the first steps had already been completed (the road system and a farm), but the architect was increasingly encountering opposition from the inhabitants and the municipality, more in favor of a reconstruction identical to the old village. *Le Bosquel, un village renaît* thematizes this opposition. The central sequence shows the visit of an MRU delegate. He attends a meeting with the villagers; the camera stresses how unruly and inattentive they are, while he speaks calmly. The villagers then disappear from the screen, and

the delegate addresses the camera directly, explaining how the planned transformations will allow for “better living and working conditions.” Although the architect Paul Dufournet does not speak in the film (the fact that the MRU delegate, and not the architect himself, addresses the audience is indicative of the designer’s subordinate role), we nevertheless see him receiving the inhabitants individually to listen to their complaints. While the commentary insists on his “unalterable patience,” the villagers are presented as grumpy, discontented, and *patois* speaking, thus reinforcing the divide between urban and rural, cultivated and (supposedly) uneducated classes, the latter in need of guidance and help from the former—a common trait in postwar documentaries. The film concludes by mentioning that the experience is “full of promise,” while at the same time seeking to reassure viewers: “There is no ideal village that can be built anywhere,” and each territory will determine the conditions of its own reconstruction. In spite of its obvious desire to convince Le Bosquel’s inhabitants of the merits of Dufournet’s approach, the film did not overturn the opposition. In February 1948, the architect’s contract was not renewed. The municipality and some villagers opposed his projects, and the innovative experiment came to an end. Moreover, the mechanization that was transforming the agricultural world soon made some of Dufournet’s ideas for the redesign of farms obsolete.<sup>6</sup>

Bottoni and Dufournet share the image of a patronizing architect, a sort of “good doctor” who, in paternalistic ways, tries to accommodate the requests and wishes of the inhabitants, but remains firmly convinced of his own beliefs and plans for the architectural, urban, and therefore social reshaping of cities and villages. While the architects imposed their visions on new urban districts or rural areas, these films gently tried to impose their condescending, helpful, yet slightly commanding figure to the audience. A model of architect that, as we will see, would soon face contestation.

### **Praising the Architect: Archi-Star, *Maestri*, and “Builders of Happiness”**

The films of the MRU, as well as those of the Triennale, highlight specific initiatives, carried out by architects who appear to be entirely in charge of

6 See <https://fresques.ina.fr/picardie/fiche-media/Picardoo0443/le-bosquel-un-projet-rural-urbaniste-d-apres-guerre.html>.

the projects they are supervising. However, the scope of these films remained rather limited. The films circulated in relatively small circles and, despite their broad aim, responded to specific local issues; while representing the architect, they do not overtly celebrate him as artist, intellectual, or “author” of the city. In contrast to this relative self-effacement, another model could be traced: that of the archi-star, embodied at best by Le Corbusier, who fully assumed a position at the center of attention, even shading with his charisma his own achievements.

From 1945 until his death in the mid-1960s, Le Corbusier appeared very regularly in newsreels, both in France and abroad, thus reaching a huge audience. His work as an architect did not solve all the problems linked to the lack of housing, but he was uncontestedly the flag bearer of an ideal of housing accessible to all that was revisited and rearranged countless times by other designers. His interest in cinema flourished at the same time as his collaboration with photographer Lucien Hervé, who became his designated photographer in the first half of the 1950s. Le Corbusier worked closely with Hervé, together choosing framings and photo angles. Although Le Corbusier had already established himself on the architectural scene as early as the 1920s, the postwar period provided him with the long-awaited opportunity to bring to life projects that had long remained purely theoretical. His many interventions, first in newsreels and filmed interviews, then in documentaries, allowed him to explain his ideas to a wider public. His first cinematic appearances after the war took place among other artists and intellectuals. In *L'Art retrouvé* (Rediscovered art), a short film produced by Actualités Françaises in 1945, and in *Les architectes s'emploient à créer les villes de demain* (Architects work to create the cities of tomorrow), a report by Actualités Françaises in November 1945, he is presented alongside Auguste Perret as one of the most eminent architects in charge of the reconstruction, before single-handedly embodying the profession in the feature film *La vie commence demain* (Life starts tomorrow, dir. Nicole Vedrès, FR, 1950).

The 1950s were punctuated by three short films, this time entirely dedicated to him: *Le Corbusier travaille* (Le Corbusier works, dir. Gabriel Chéreau, FR, 1951), *La Cité Radieuse de Le Corbusier* (Le Corbusier's La Cité Radieuse, dir. Jean Sacha, FR, 1952), and *Le Corbusier, architecte du bonheur* (Le Corbusier, architect of happiness, dir. Pierre Kast, FR, 1957). The titles alone reveal that Le Corbusier is the heart of these films, while his architectural realizations only come second. Although at first sight very similar in their discourse and patterns (all films focus on La Cité Radieuse, which as the first *Unité d'habitation*, a modernist residential building, built by Le Corbusier

between 1947 and 1952 in Marseille<sup>7</sup>), the three films actually reveal the shift between the need, at first, to respond to the criticism aimed at his creation and the later inclusion of his work in the national (and international) history of architecture. Indeed, Gabriel Chéreau, who directed *Le Corbusier travaille*, was Le Corbusier's lawyer and came up with the idea of the film "as a defense in the trial of the Société pour l'Esthétique Générale de la France concerning the visual nuisance of the housing unit in the Marseilles landscape" (Boone 2004, 193). Once La Cité Radieuse was built and inhabited (the second film, directed by Jean Sacha, was released at this time), Le Corbusier, then in his sixties, became aware of the perishable dimension of his architectural work. He actively initiated a process aimed at archiving his work and establishing his heritage, where cinema could play a crucial role. Historians Rémi Baudouï and Arnaud Dercelles observe: "The avant-garde man is a prisoner of his past. The future no longer exists" (2017, 28). The film Pierre Kast directed in 1957 can be regarded as part of this patrimonialization of Le Corbusier's work. He is portrayed as a man whose ideas have certainly been innovative and who, despite his age, continues to draw and create, but he also appears on the screen as if isolated from his contemporaries. Furthermore, *Le Corbusier, architecte du bonheur* can be considered a counterpoint to an earlier Kast's film entitled *L'architecte maudit* (The damned architect, FR, 1953) dedicated to Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, architect to Louis XV. *L'architecte maudit* also features La Cité Radieuse, and Ledoux is presented as the "predecessor" of Le Corbusier. The commentary concluded with the regret that Ledoux's name has been largely forgotten despite his work, a hint at Le Corbusier's fear that his reputation and oeuvre could disappear after him too. Nevertheless, Le Corbusier's numerous media appearances did contribute to making him widely known to the public, sharing with Picasso the status of a true "art documentary star." A resident of La Cité Radieuse in Marseille, interviewed in February 2020, recalled very precisely the shock she felt when the radio announced Le Corbusier's death in 1965. Although she had never met him in real life, her reaction proved the feeling of familiarity and closeness with the architect.

The figure of Le Corbusier was highly influential in Italy, a model for the entire postwar generation. No Italian architect reached such a level of widespread popularity, and no similar "archi-star" can be found in Italian

7 Le Corbusier initiated the project, which later saw fundamental collaborations from Charlotte Perriand and Jean Prouvé. Although men dominated the profession (and therefore the films on architecture), Perriand was responsible for many aspects of the Cité Radieuse flats that still shape their modernity and functionality today.

documentaries and newsreels. However, a fictional, masterful architect capable of creating a better city and a happier life through his ideals and visions—clearly based on Le Corbusier—appears in the documentary *Uomini e case* (Men and Houses, IT, 1955), directed by Raffaello Pacini with the supervision of art historian Valerio Mariani, to promote the achievements of the INA-Casa plan, the largest housing program launched by the government in 1949. Positive but not fully celebratory, the architect's portrait offered by the film includes some elements of criticism towards the ideals of modernist architecture.

The film starts with the visit of a young designer to an older architect who was a mentor to him. The young man is surprised to see the other passionately designing “modern and simple” buildings: “So, from luxury villas, he moved to popular houses, [...] what he had once called ‘termite nests.’” Intrigued, the young designer starts a dialogue with his “maestro,” as the film goes on a tour of the new quarters built by the program in Italy,<sup>8</sup> discovering “a brand-new country.”

This short opening sequence, with its generational opposition, seems to encapsulate two different phases of Le Corbusier's career (the architect par excellence), but also a statement and an exhortation. Since its launch six years before, the INA-Casa plan had already involved almost a third of Italian architects and urban planners (Di Biagi 2013), who had joined the program attracted by the opportunity of freely experimenting with city design, though always within the limits of the governmental plan. At the same time, on the eve of a seven-year renovation (which would happen in 1956), *Uomini e case* called for further architects who, even if still doubtful or reluctant like the film's young protagonist, should give a concrete contribution to the national reconstruction.

The old architect who moved away from elegant villas and exclusive palaces in favor of popular architecture evidently hints at the interwar generation of modernist designers. Despite being still regarded as models, the limits and aporias of their proposals started to become clearer and clearer in the postwar period. The architect is praised as an essential social agent, capable of rebuilding architectural spaces and amending urban connections, collective bonds, and cultural relations, but the tenets of the modernist movement are nonetheless put into doubt when the young designer admits that “architecture needs to stem from the habits of modern men, rather than imposing itself on their necessities.” The film's polemic verve targets Le Corbusier and his *machines à habiter* more precisely when

8 See Pitassio, Praetorius-Rhein, and Val, in this volume.

the voice-over states that “houses are not those ‘machines for living’ at the center of the endless discussions of modern architecture,” or the Rationalist Italian designers and their cooperation with the Fascist regime, since the old maestro “does not care anymore about complicated monumental projects,” but prefers to propose solutions “to the real problems afflicting modern citizens.”

In a subsequent scene, facing the Roman skyline at sunset, he shows his younger friend the possible reconciliation between tradition and modernity—the ever-present, unresolved issue of Italian architecture (and of all documentaries about it). As long as the new quarters are entrusted to the care of valid urban planners, they can become an efficient and respectful modern frame for ancient palaces and squares, for Bernini’s domes or Borromini’s bell towers. Modern architecture should not pose itself in opposition to tradition, rather in synergy, reinterpreting in original ways specific local elements like colors, materials, or construction techniques. Throughout the film, the will to distance the reconstruction from the most extreme forms of interwar functionalist architecture, seen as standardized and impersonal, emerges clearly in favor of more specific approaches, connected to local cultures, historic backgrounds, the national (architectural) identity. Only the architect, so the film suggests, has the skills, knowledge, and taste to achieve this goal. In addition to being a social agent, he must therefore also act as historical agent, shaping the relation between past and present, creating a fruitful dialogue between memory and future.

### **Contesting the Architect: Towards a Participatory Urbanism**

The mid-1950s were simultaneously the height of social recognition for architects in Italy and France, but also the beginning of the criticism for their work. Even if Le Corbusier was very present on the screens, he spent a lot of time abroad (after the construction of a second Cité Radieuse in Rezé, he worked mainly in Chandigarh, India); Auguste Perret died in February 1954. Although it disappeared from the screens, the scaffolding was still widely present throughout the country, accentuating the slow pace of the reconstruction. Camille Canteux shows how the large housing estates, which at first appeared to be the miracle solution to the housing shortage and were the topic of very enthusiastic reports, quickly aroused concern and then condemnation. La Cité Radieuse in Marseille was certainly an early example of such contestations, but the authority embodied by Le Corbusier helped to silence the critics. This was nevertheless the exception.

Most of the architects who took charge of the reconstruction and therefore launched the building of large housing estates were either young designers who saw the chance to practice and build their reputation, or less well-known professionals; they often lacked experience, talent, or simply a clear project vision. The competition was strong, the urgency of reconstruction was real, and expectations very high. This contributed to stimulating innovation, but also to neglecting and hastening certain projects. The Rotterdam housing estate in Strasbourg, built even more quickly than La Cité Radieuse, is a perfect example. The edifice was erected in record time (only fourteen months) and the first inhabitants moved in as early as 1953. The housing complex was the subject of several news reports showing great enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the flats quickly deteriorated, and renovation work was already necessary from 1955 onwards. Several films reveal the fears linked to this new urban landscape. Whereas the insalubriousness of old, outdated housing is denounced, these new large housing estates are frightening because of their gigantic size and monotony. When there was no architect to defend and explain the project, the newsreels gave voice to the inhabitants, who at first expressed their joy, but later increasingly denounced boredom and disappointment. The rise of television conveyed these changes of perception even more: it “gradually tears the large housing estates away from their utopian dimension to inscribe them in a darker reality” (Canteux 2014, 341). Modernism, replicated on massive scale, imitated by less-talented designers than their celebrated masters, banalized in countless and hasty projects, showed its unpleasant, unsettling face, creating an unwelcoming, impersonal, and even alienating urban landscape that the camera captures and portrays without hesitation.

This growing criticism expressed by public opinion from the late 1950s had been anticipated within the disciplinary debate, as new forms of urban planning in contrast with modernist paradigms emerged and gained relevance. It was again the cinematographic activity around Milan's Triennale that translated into moving images a first wave of architectural opposition to functionalist models, in an attempt to initiate participative forms of urbanism. Behind the “maestro” of *Uomini e case*, one could in fact also glimpse an allusion to Ludovico Quaroni, prominent representative of Italian postwar architecture. With Carlo Doglio and Giancarlo De Carlo, he was appointed curator of the urbanism section at the tenth Triennale in 1954. The three architects conceived an exhibition deeply shaped by the idea of cinema, where films served to present a new vision of urbanism to a large public and to critically trigger a dialogue among the professionals. The small exhibit at Palazzo dell'Arte, designed by Albe Steiner, was inspired by silent





Figure 13.2. X  
Triennale of Milan,  
1954. Cinemerascopio (device for  
cinematographic  
projections in  
daylight) at the  
urban planning  
exhibition of the  
Tenth Triennale.  
© Triennale  
Milano—Archivi.

movies. Hanging on dark walls, black-and-white photographs, maps, and drawings were intermingled with captions, leading the visitors to a final room where three short documentaries, known as the “Triennale trilogy,” were alternatively screened through the “*cinemerascopio*.”

Succeeding in “irritating everyone,” as architecture critic Bruno Zevi wrote in a harsh review (1954, 170), the exhibition and its films presented a strong stance against modernist architecture, contesting the prewar, functionalist, and still dominant approach to city planning to propose a new paradigm based on collective, democratic participation. Rejecting the traditional ideas of the architect as an artist or a technician, as a paternal “good doctor” capable of healing the city or an “almighty creator” free to transform it as he wished, Quaroni, Doglio, and De Carlo saw the city planner

as the attentive coordinator of a joint social, political, and cultural effort, stimulating and promoting the direct participation of citizens in designing their own town. Especially for De Carlo, the modernist movement had imagined its urban projects with an abstract addressee in mind, whereas urban planning should always be in direct contact with the people living the city space, who have the right to be informed, take part, criticize, and directly intervene in urban processes. As the three curators stated while presenting the exhibit, “[W]e know that once again you will think that urbanism is our business, the technicians’ business. Urbanism is instead your business. [...] You have the right to contribute with your opinion and your action” (“La Mostra” 1954, 20).

Throughout these lines and in the three films, Doglio, Quaroni, and De Carlo echoed the principles of the Associazione per l’Architettura Organica (APAO, Association for Organic Architecture) founded by Bruno Zevi in Rome in 1945, professing the will to “overcome the heritage of the so-called ‘Rationalism’” (Tafuri 1986, 12). Inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright’s positions, organic architecture pursued the liberation of space from functional and machinist constraints, its restitution to human dimensions and uses. The city plan should never be an imposition, rather a shared project promoting social cohesion. Speaking of Quaroni and Mario Ridolfi’s INA-Casa quartier in Rome (the Tiburtino), Zevi himself wrote that “a motto seems to pervade their projects: ‘I take part, therefore we are’” (Tafuri 1986, 15). In doing so, organic architecture polemically questioned the legacy of the modernist movement and contributed to the renovation of Italian architecture and urbanism.

Explicitly stating that “it is we [the citizens], day by day and altogether, who shape this space,” *Una lezione di urbanistica* (A lesson in urban planning, IT, 1954), with a screenplay by Giancarlo De Carlo and directed by Gerardo Guerrieri, slashes out at the interwar architectural culture by demolishing one of its cornerstones, the *Exsistenzminimum*, that is, the design of an efficient and standardized home answering to all needs and offering all comforts in the smallest possible space. The film starts with a sarcastic, Tati-like depiction of the protagonist’s laborious morning routine, as he is “trapped” in a modern apartment more like a cage than a comfortable accommodation. His situation does not improve as he goes out to work, facing congested traffic, dangerous streets, anonymous places. Thanks to the performance of Italian mime actors from Jacques Lecocq’s famous school, the film portrays human inadequacy towards modern environments, reinforcing the comical effect with an extensive use of antiphrasis. While the voice-over glorifies the prodigies of progress, the images show the

awkward, impossible, and humiliating situations the protagonist is forced to go through. Becoming openly polemic, the film goes on ridiculing three different kinds of architect who unsuccessfully try to solve the problem of city design: the architect-artist, moved by romantic inspiration and treating urban space as a canvas; the planner-engineer, focusing on traffic regulation and machine-like infrastructures; and lastly, the professor-scientist with projects based merely on abstract knowledge, statistics, mathematics, and a standardized simulation of the human body clearly mocking Le Corbusier's *modulator*. His "perfect model" for the new town is the least suitable to human life. Imposing inhuman spaces and habits to the citizens, the professor-scientist "for the sake of its own plan, becomes a tyrant for men." The protagonist, caught among equally inefficient solutions, does not find any livable place.

The modern metropolis is, indeed, a difficult and challenging environment, whose portrait and historical evolution are the subjects of the second film, *La città degli uomini* (The city of men, written by Carlo Doglio, dir. Michele Gandin, IT, 1954). Chaotic and oppressive, the urban environment alienates its inhabitants, causes inequalities and abuses, prevents those democratic relations and participative dynamics that it is the planner's task to create, facilitate, and maintain through urban design. After depicting the city in its negative aspects, "revolted against the men who had built it," the film closes on a positive note, remarking on how it can still be redeemed, becoming a place of human growth, relations, and culture. Halfway through an interwar city symphony and a social documentary, *La città degli uomini* explicitly refers to Lewis Mumford's film *The City* (US, 1939), revealing the determining influence of American urbanism in the conception of the trilogy. Quaroni, De Carlo, and Doglio were part of the intellectual milieu gathered around the "enlightened entrepreneur" Adriano Olivetti and his "Movimento Comunità," a political party and cultural movement that saw the participation of many prominent intellectuals.<sup>9</sup> Comunità—whose name itself declares its emphasis on social and political ideas of democracy, solidarity, and participation—crucially contributed to the cultural renovation of the country, particularly in urban planning, and it was through its publishing house that the first translations of Mumford's writings were finally available in Italian.

9 On the Movimento Comunità, see Iglieri 2019. Adriano Olivetti, owner of the eponymous typewriter company, was deeply involved in urban planning, becoming president of the Italian Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (National Institute of Urbanism) (see Olmo 2001) from 1951. On the rich film production around Olivetti and Comunità, see Bellotto 1991. Some Olivetti films are discussed in Česálková and Dotto, in this volume.

The model of the satellite city,<sup>10</sup> so relevant in British and American urbanism, as well as connected with the German model of the *Siedlung*, is originally reinterpreted in the third and last film, *Cronache dell'urbanistica italiana* (Chronicles of Italian urbanism, written by Quaroni, dir. Nicolò Ferrari, IT, 1954). After tracing a disenchanting and pessimistic description of Italian towns after years of monumental but useless projects under the Fascist regime and the following war disasters, it presents Quaroni's model settlement "La Martella," outside Matera, as an example of regeneration based on collective participation. While providing modern, hygienic, and decent accommodations, liberating the lower classes from their ancestral misery in Matera's infamous *Sassi* (natural caves where people had dwelled for centuries in the poorest conditions), La Martella intends to reconnect to the *genius loci*, the local architecture and the landscape, balancing modernity with tradition, innovation, and respect for the inhabitant's needs, desires, and lifestyles. Instead of other attempts to reshape cities and villages, unsuccessful because detached from these factors, the film claims that in this case "people, through participation, have the possibility to make the reconstruction actual urban planning, a tool for everyone and not a weapon for few." Architecture and urbanism are openly presented as political matters, whose effects reach far beyond issues of living conditions or territorial management, touching class struggles, social inequality, the effective exercise of democracy.

The "scandalous" trilogy, whose efforts in promoting architectural understanding were deemed "wrong and hopeless, [...] counterproductive and negative" (Piccinato 1954, 27) caused reactions and debates, both in Italy and elsewhere (Ciacci 2001, 96). Although regular distribution was initially envisioned, this never happened, and the films were screened only on specific occasions outside the 1954 Triennale (usually at architectural meetings), nonetheless becoming a "classic" for their polemic and propositional strength by the 1970s.

For the purposes of this chapter, the trilogy remarkably presents a major shift in the representation of architects, and consequently of architecture

<sup>10</sup> This concept of shared, democratic city planning is thematized in a British animated documentary. *Charley in New Town* (dir. John Halas and Joy Batchelor, sponsored by UK's Ministry of Town and Country Planning, UK, 1948) underlines the relationship of future inhabitants with experts and institutions in charge of designing and shaping a new city. The urban planner listens to their needs and wishes, adapts the project accordingly, and tries to meet their requests without imposing a preconceived vision. The people's active participation is represented as an essential step to build the civic spirit and a sense of community, the immaterial yet central pillar of the new urban environment (Baiocco 2012).

and urbanism. As we tried to show, the patronizing professionals and the modernist archi-stars, both legacies of the interwar modernist movement, are here contested and replaced by full-fledged social agents at the service of citizens, aware of and engaged in the political dimensions of their activities and ideas. That the cityscape ultimately results not from abstract visions or functionalist criteria, rather from collective participation and democratic processes, under the careful but discreet guidance of experts, was a bold affirmation (even though not at all a new one) that shook the discipline, reconnecting it to sociology and politics at large. This appeared to many architects as a dangerous loss of autonomy and social status, probably causing their rejection of the trilogy's proposals. But the path was traced for the following decades, as summed up by the final exhortation of *Una lezione di urbanistica*: "Go to the city, man, and collaborate with those who want to make it more human, more like you."

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## 14. Restructuring (Post)colonial Relationships

European Empires between Decolonization, Trusteeships, and a New Projection in Africa

*Gianmarco Mancosu*

### Abstract

At the end of World War II, newsreels and documentaries played a crucial role in somatizing the trauma of the loss of power caused by the end of the empire, whilst at the same time representing the restructuring of (post)colonial relationship like the Commonwealth, the Union Française, and various forms of trusteeship administrations under the aegis of the UN. This contribution sheds a comparative light on how some European countries (UK in Togoland, 1946–56; France in Cameroun, 1946–59; Italy in Somalia, 1950–60) envisioned their new political presence. I highlight common patterns in the representation mechanism of the former colonial world, thus conceiving the images of trusteeship administrations as a means to rearticulate a hegemony over the newly independent states.

**Keywords:** trauma, colonial and postcolonial film, newsreels, documentaries, Cameroun, Somalia

### Introduction: Filming the Empires' End

The end of World War II and the subsequent reconstruction of the European countries involved in the war intersected with another, and likewise momentous, turmoil occurring in the middle of the twentieth century, that is, the process that led to the collapse of some of the most significant imperial structures. This notwithstanding, at the close of the Second World War, “the peoples of Western Europe—who were hard put to govern or even



feed themselves—continued to rule much of the non-European world” (Judt 2005, 278). Therefore, one cannot think to the process of postwar reconstruction without considering the ways with which some countries coped with the crumbling of their overseas power. Although decolonial events and processes may be described as related to precise dates and time spans—including India gaining its independence in 1947, the French wars in Indochina (1946–54) and Algeria (1954–62), the Egyptian revolution (1952), the Suez crisis (1956), and several African countries gaining their independence since the late 1950s (Betts 2003)—it is likewise undeniable that in the decade spanning from the end of WWII to the Bandung Conference (1955),<sup>1</sup> both major (Great Britain, France) and minor (Italy, the Netherlands) colonial powers attempted to restructure their political and cultural projection in what was becoming the postcolonial world. This, of course, had political and economic motivations, to the extent that the reconstruction of European countries was still relying upon the exploitation of resources from the soon-to-be former colonies (Bhambra 2021; Mann 2012). Moreover, the undoing of empires required a radical cultural and social shift, a change in “how politics was thought about—taking away the aura of normality attached to empire for millennia—and this change came about through a mix of mobilization in the colonies, international interaction, and domestic politics in metropolises” (Cooper 2005, 188).

Cultural practices of various kinds became privileged means to envision such momentous transitions. Among these, moving pictures played a major role. Whether they addressed the persistence of para-colonial ties between (former) metropole and (former) colony, or the shift towards anti-colonial practices, the post-colonial apparatus of film production can be fruitfully regarded as a microcosm of the larger political, ideological, and operational structures mobilized to represent the crumbling of imperial structures and the new world order.<sup>2</sup> A wealth of scholarship has addressed these political and cultural results in major imperial experiences (namely the United

1 This conference brought together a substantial number of formerly colonized countries aiming to detach themselves from the influence both of the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc (Young 2005, 11–21).

2 In this chapter, “post-colonial” (hyphenated) will be used to indicate a temporal fracture, in this case the period following the formal colonial presence. The term “(post)colonial” (with the prefix in parentheses) will instead designate the continuity of political and cultural processes that started during the colonial season and continued in its aftermath. The term “postcolonial/ism” (unhyphenated) refers to the political, ideological, and scholarly critique of colonial history, practices, and knowledge, whose temporalities may or may not be consistent with the political events that brought about the end of the empires.

Kingdom and France), often according to nationally centered analytical perspectives (Grieverson and MacCabe 2011; Rice 2019; Bloom 2008). However, far less attention has been devoted to the study of how “minor” and “belated” empires’ film structures coped with the end of the colonial domain and with the restructuring of (post)colonial relationships. Against this backdrop, the Italian case might be extremely significant: this is mostly because Italy, long considered “peripheral” in the geography of European colonialism, struggled to rearrange forms of direct influence over its African territories as part of its attempt to rejoin the Atlantic political sphere after the Fascist collapse. Therefore, looking at the ways in which Italy envisioned its loss of the colonies and its future projection in Africa might be revealing of the extent to which a “peripheral” imperial experience reframed the borders of the “first world” politically and conceptually (Ponzanesi 2012). To do so, I will explore the intermingling of political and cultural practices as they surfaced from non-fiction films about Italy’s trusteeship of Somalia (1950–60).

Widening the research horizon, this chapter will adopt a comparative approach, enabling a transnational reflection on common patterns through which Italy, the UK, and France represented their trusteeship administrations. I will focus on three case studies, namely: the UK during its trusteeship administration of Togoland, 1946–56; France during its trusteeship administration of French Cameroon, 1946–59; and Italy during its trusteeship administration of Somalia. As we shall see in the following section, the choice to focus on these examples is motivated not merely by similar and even intersecting chronologies. Rather, the common thread is the fact that, as far as the selected experiences are concerned, the United Nations (UN) entrusted (or renewed) a time-limited trusteeship to those countries that, before the war, were the colonial rulers of future entrusted territories. European newsreels and short documentaries, either directly or indirectly supported by the governments, played a crucial role in rearticulating such a blatant continuity, envisioning the restructuring of para-colonial relationships like the Commonwealth, the Union Française, and various forms of trusteeship administration under the aegis of the UN. Therefore, focusing on particularly meaningful non-fiction films on the above case studies, I will highlight common patterns in the representational mechanisms of the former colonial world, thus conceiving the images of trusteeship administrations as attempts to rearticulate a form of epistemic and economic hegemony over the newly independent African states.

## Coping with the End of the Empires: Decolonization and the UN Trusteeship System

The global rearrangement in WWII's aftermath materialized the decline of modern imperial powers and structures, which gave inexorably way to the arising Cold War superpowers and to supranational organizations like the United Nations. At the same time, the national forces that were leading the reconstruction of the European States (political parties, economic elites, cultural actors) tried to avoid any direct confrontation with the violence and exploitation proper to colonial rule, which was increasingly challenged by anti-colonial movements and discourses (Thomas and Thompson 2018; Thomas, More and Butler 2010; Gilroy 2004, 16). Former colonial powers often faced the loss of their imperial prestige by refashioning old paradigms like the civilizing mission or the inability of formerly colonized societies to manage their independent future. These narratives were recast in the guise of trusteeship administrations, developmental cooperation, financial aid, and global partnerships.

The trusteeship system is a noteworthy example of such a political and discursive process: it was the successor of the mandate administration that was set by the League of Nations to govern the former colonial territories of the German and Ottoman empires after WWI. It operated mainly on the principle of state-based administration. In most cases, the UN entrusted a given state (often the former colonial ruler/mandate administrator) to "supervise" the path towards self-government and development of the entrusted territory (Stahn 2008, 92–114; Gilchrist 1947). Looking more specifically at the selected case studies, the UK trusteeship of Togoland replaced the former mandate established by the League of Nations in the aftermath of WWI, when Germany had lost its overseas territories and Togoland was divided vertically between Britain and France. The colonial governors of British Togoland attempted to find an "appropriate balance between the land claims of what were perceived as a hotchpotch of tribal affinities" (Stacey 2014, 427), though without success. After WWII, British Togoland became an UN trust territory; although still administered by the crown, now the trustee had ten years to prepare the entrusted territory to independence. In 1956, a plebiscite was organized, and Togo citizens voted to merge the territory with the neighboring Gold Coast, another British colony that in 1957 became the British dominion of Ghana (Stacey 2014; Skinner 2007).

Before WWI, Cameroon was a German protectorate that was then conquered by the British and French military forces during the war. Afterwards,

France and Britain were entrusted by the League of Nations with the mandate over the country. France ruled the larger portion of Cameroon. During the mandate, *assimilation* policies were pursued, for instance, by imposing the use of French language and law, even though some social and political regional practices persisted (Nana 2016; Gentili 2014, 195–96; Betts 2005). In the aftermath of WWII, the mandate became a UN trusteeship, and French colonial authorities pushed for the economic modernization of the country. This notwithstanding, anti-colonial movements like the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC, Union of the Peoples of Cameroun) grew significantly. Tension was aroused, and in 1955 the French Fourth Republic outlawed the UPC, fostering anti-colonial guerrilla forces that lasted until Cameroon's independence in 1960. A year later, the former British Cameroon merged with its neighbor Nigeria, forming the Federal Republic of Cameroon, except for those southern regions that decided to join French Cameroon, which initially was a bilingual state (DeLancey, Neh Mbuh, and DeLancey 2010).

Italy experienced a different and, to a certain extent, missed decolonial transition. The Fascist empire in Africa collapsed at the hands of the Allied forces between 1941 and 1943. In the aftermath of WWII, despite the genuine anti-Fascist ethos that inspired the Governi d'unità Nazionale (National Unity Cabinet), post-Fascist governments requested that the colonies acquired before Fascism be returned to Italy. Italy's diplomatic efforts aimed to regain a form of direct influence over Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia, though their results fell far below expectations. On February 10, 1947, Italy signed the Treaty of Peace, formally ending hostilities. Italy had to renounce its former colonies, though the future arrangement of those territories was not agreed upon. Due to this deadlock, in 1949, the Italian diplomatic strategy suddenly changed. Italy supported the immediate independence of Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia after a transitory period of a UN trusteeship administration, the Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia (AFIS, Trust Territory of Somaliland under Italian Administration) lasting from 1950 to 1960. The ten years of AFIS was meant to prepare the country for independence. As we shall see throughout this chapter, AFIS *de facto* did not move far away, either conceptually or practically, from the previous colonial setting (Deplano and Pes 2024; Morone 2016).<sup>3</sup>

3 Antonio Morone maintains that AFIS trusteeship, despite being under the aegis of the United Nations, was in fact a form of direct administration that presented strong continuities with the old colonial power in terms of political and social practices.

## *Mise-en-valeur* and *Mise-en-scène*: Filming the Entrusted Territories

Edward Said maintains that “just as culture may predispose and actively prepare one society for the overseas domination of another, it may also prepare one society to relinquish or modify the idea of overseas domination” (1994, 199–200). In the context of this analysis, we will observe how some non-fiction films envisioned the entrusted territories in metropolitan centers in a way that was able to somatize the intersecting postwar and decolonial traumas, by simultaneously rearranging the political and epistemic domination over the former colonial landscape. The focus is on a very specific body of documents, which may fall under the rubric of “para-colonial footage” (that is, newsreels, short documentaries, educative films) about the entrusted territories, which circulated in metropolitan centers.<sup>4</sup> Newsreels and documentaries were highly privileged tools to envision the new social and cultural configuration of postwar Europe, mostly centered on the values typical of the hegemonic forces that were governing the process of reconstruction (Chambers, Jönsson, and Vande Winkel 2018, 1–11). On the other hand, I deemed para-colonial footage worthy of close investigation for its implicit assertion to offer a representation of the (post)colonial reality as truthfully as possible. The indexical relationship they aimed to build with what happened in front of the camera made them instrumental tools to deliver political and cultural messages, whether directly or in more surreptitious ways. Such para-colonial footage can therefore be regarded as part of “governmentality” techniques, to use Foucault’s suggestion, insofar as they aimed not simply to repress or indoctrinate. Rather, they sustained a specific configuration of power which permeated the everyday life of the population by educating citizens according to new political, economic, social, and cultural categories (Bonifazio 2014; Vande Winkel 2006). To put it differently,

cinema might be situated, at a particular moment (the first third or so of the twentieth century, say), as a node around and through which flowed discourses and practices of government as a shaping of the modalities of selfhood, citizenship and populations. (Grieverson 2009, 186)

4 The term “para-colonial” indicate the liminal status of cultural products that, although produced in a post-colonial context, replicated the rhetoric and the images of previous colonial discourses and practices.

The end of empires did not bring about a sudden change in film traditions or in the market dynamics of the countries involved in decolonial transition. Stylistic and structural continuities reflected the ambiguity of decolonization as a historically located phenomenon. As Tom Rice explains, despite some changes in terms of non-fiction film contents, the production structures and the reference culture inspiring film narratives often remained that of the former colonial discourse (Rice 2011). Moreover, though it is unquestionable that decolonization encouraged the independent development of post- and anti-colonial cinema cultures in formerly colonized nations as well as in metropolitan centers, the results of that process were controversial, as has been pointed out by Ian Aitken and Camille Deprez. They emphasize the significant connections between colonial and post-colonial cinema histories while referring to non-fiction films crafted by former colonial powers (Aitken and Deprez 2017; Jaikumar 2006). This is the case for the British government's Colonial Film Unit (CFU), which operated as a branch of the film division of the Ministry of Information to make propaganda films addressing African audiences. Established in the 1939 in the aftermath of WWII, the CFU changed its purposes, moving towards a more educational purpose and aiming to "enable Africans to live healthy and more productive lives" (Smyth 1992, 163). Furthermore, in 1947, another service was added to the CFU's agenda, that is, the managing of film exhibitions about colonial territories addressing metropolitan (and noncolonial) audiences. Examples of this practice are educational films like *Weaving in Togoland* (UK, 1946) and *Nigerian Cocoa Farmer* (UK, 1948), about the industrial progress and cooperative efforts among colonizers and colonized people able to envisage "a broader model of colonial partnership, one that simultaneously promoted social welfare and economic productivity" (Rice 2019, 162–63). These films were subsequently adapted into some British Pathé newsreels, which circulated in the UK and in Europe (Grieverson and MacCabe 2011, 159).

The representation of the cooperation between Europeans and Africans towards economic growth and modernization—still according to Western categories and prerogatives—was clear also in the French case (De Pastre 2004). In France, the Comité de Propagande Colonial par le Film (CPCF, Colonial Film Committee) was established in the late 1920s. As observed by Peter Bloom, this committee was meant to expand and supplement an "imagery that was first developed as part of a system of lending archives for educational, industrial, and fairground exhibitors, known as the Agences Économiques," set up by Albert Sarraut, who was the minister of the colonies during the 1920s. In Sarraut's vision, the promotion of colonial educational cinema was instrumental to the economic development of the colonies,

which, in turn, would have led to the moral, political, educational, and social modernization of the overseas territories (Bloom 2008, 128). In the late 1930s, the CCPF commissioned the company France Outre-mer Films and its representative, Pierre Boisson, to produce footage that was used to make prominent propaganda films about the French Sub-Saharan colonies: *L'œuvre de la France au Cameroun* (The activity of France in Cameroon, FR, 1936), *Les richesses du Cameroun* (The resources of Cameroon, FR, 1936), and *A travers le Cameroun* (Traveling across Cameroon, FR, 1936). This trilogy aimed to show metropolitan audiences the beneficial presence of France in Africa and the positive impact of the League of Nations mandate over the colony (Tsogo Momo 2016).

In Italy, the transition from a colonial to a post-colonial system of film production was encompassed within the passage from an industry controlled by the Fascist state to an officially private one, which nonetheless remained supported by—and even oriented to—the Italian governments (Mancosu 2023; Mancosu 2021).<sup>5</sup> Films about the end of the empire in the Horn of Africa and Libya dealt with the international decisions about the former colonies, the Italian communities still living in those countries, and the new diplomatic relationships with Ethiopia. Within this corpus, one of the recurring themes was the description of the ten-year trusteeship of Somalia. Several newsreels and documentaries, close to the government's agenda, described the activity of Italy in Somalia concerning the process of industrialization, agricultural modernization, and the education of African people. Any reference to the previous Fascist colonial phase is totally obliterated; this does not prevent the films from referring to the allegedly civilizing work of Italians in Africa since the Roman Empire. Such continuity now materializes in the country's continued presence in Somalia under the umbrella of the UN. Even though Italy's trusteeship did not come after a post-WWI mandate—as it happened in British Togoland

5 The dismantling of the state monopoly over non-fiction films, which had been inherited from the Fascist *ventennio*, was all but easy. Postwar political and economic elites still conceived of those short films as powerful tools to address Italian society. As far as the newsreel market is concerned, direct and indirect forms of government influence in film production created a rather peculiar scenario. Despite the growing number of private companies that were desperate for state funding, only a few of them—including *Industria Cortometraggi Milano* (Incom), *Documento Film*, and *Astra Cinematografica*—thrive. Further appraisal reveals that Incom practically monopolized this oligopolistic configuration, because of its ideological affinity with the political and economic elites. For almost two decades, *La settimana Incom* newsreels received the majority of state prizes allocated for non-fiction productions, thus becoming the privileged tool through which the government conveyed ideas about Italy's renewed presence in Africa.

and French Cameroon—the reference to a previous and allegedly positive impact Italy had had on Africa is a persistent trait. The argument for a return to Africa could be thus based upon a *historical* discourse about Italian qualities abroad, which started to be portrayed as simply interrupted by the Fascist parenthesis. The legitimation provided by the UN, repeatedly mentioned by the voice-over, explains the positive atmosphere expressed by the footage inasmuch as post-Fascist Italy is acknowledged as different from Fascist colonialism, notwithstanding the substantial continuity of the production mechanism and of the aesthetic devices used to support the claims to remain in Africa.

Two La settimana Incom newsreels deal with the beginning of the ten-year trusteeship: *Mogadiscio. Lo sbarco* (Landing at Mogadishu, no. 411, IT, March 1950) and *Dalla Somalia. Visita del Sottosegretario Brusasca* (Somalia: The visit of Undersecretary Brusasca, no. 455, IT, June 1950). The first film is about the arrival of the Italian army and civil servants in Somalia. According to the footage, Somali people “recognize” the Italian personnel, and they are happy to welcome them back. Somalis are portrayed as a compact entity, an adulatory backdrop to the reaffirmation of Italian values and Italy’s physical presence in Africa. The camera—probably placed in a truck—voraciously tries to capture their gestures by getting relatively close to them, but it moves too quickly; such a composition is meant to emphasize the enthusiastic participation of Africans, but it rests on a sense of fugacity which in fact conceals any possible counter-voice/counter-gaze coming from the people filmed.

The end of the transition from colonialism to trusteeship is clearer in the second newsreel, which is about the visit of Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Giuseppe Brusasca to Somalia. In the first part, he is sitting in a car parading through the streets of Mogadishu while a military demonstration pays homage to him. The mechanical roars of aircraft and tanks seem to reimpose a visual and aural domination over the city. The military presence epitomizes the renewed control of the African landscapes, which are described as marked by decades of tireless work by Italians. Moreover, a rather dynamic editing intersperses ethnographically flavored images (for instance, African people dancing and wearing “traditional” clothes) with scenes of happiness for Brusasca’s arrival. The portrayal of non-white inhabitants, along with the images of the Italian presence, metaphorically seal the end of the decade between 1941 and the 1950, which is the liminal time between the loss *manu militari* of the colony during WWII and the new phase of AFIS. The uncertain phase thus ends when Italy is officially entitled to help the Somalis towards



their development, which is, however, set according to former colonizers' priorities and ideas.

All these films—and likewise *Weaving in Togoland* as well as the French films on Cameroon—use a plethora of scenes on industrial plants, fine roads, buildings, and farms. Those scenes indirectly refer to a *mise-en-scène* which blurs the idea of *mise-en-valeur* of the former colonial space, that is, the French doctrine popularized by Albert Sarraut in the 1920s according to which colonizers assist colonized societies by providing social welfare, constructing economic infrastructures, population policies, and political engineering. In the context of the global shifting scenario that followed WWII, however, *mise-en-valeur* became a means of understanding the exploitation of former colonial resources. Albeit “conceiving, experimenting with, and implementing new policies” (Aldrich 2002, 934–35) in the entrusted territories, European states articulated a representation that organized the former colonial space as if it still pertained to the former colonial powers.

### Colonial Memories and the Uncertain Path towards Independence

The construction of a selective memory, which spread the idea of an allegedly beneficial impact of the Italian presence in the former colonies, implies that African human, as well as natural, elements must be depicted as backward and uncivilized in order to be “helped” and “redeemed” once again, now within the new scenario of AFIS. This “reclaiming” path clearly stands out in the indexical structure of some short documentaries produced mainly between 1953 and 1955 by OPUS Film—though officially backed by the Italian African Institute and the Italian administration of Somalia—entitled *Somalia d'oggi* (Somalia today, dir. Adriano Zancanella, IT, 1955), *Il fiume verde* (The green river, dir. Adriano Zancanella, IT, 1955), and *Testa d'elefante* (Elephant's head, dir. Giorgio Moser, IT, 1953). They deal with the passage from exotic backwardness to a more civilized condition because of the Italian work carried out there.

*Somalia d'oggi* in particular features an aesthetic dimension that is still imbued with resilient forms of colonial rhetoric. This 1955 film is about the activities of the Italian trusteeship administration, five years on from its beginning. Especially noteworthy are the scenes set in a school, when the camera takes close-up shots of smiling students inside a classroom. At some point the teacher—a Somali native who, according to another passage, has been trained by Italians—grabs the arm of a boy who is reluctant to enter

the classroom. Although the hilarious background music makes these scenes resemble an innocent farce, the “*dolce violenza del maestro*” (“gentle violence of the teacher”) is an embodied remainder of the violence characterizing the colonial imposition of the former settlers’ epistemic order. A colonial discourse is thus acting indirectly and resiliently through the agency of those former subjects—in this case the teacher—who are willing to accept, translate, and reproduce the supposed moral and intellectual superiority of the white-Western-Italian elements in their society.

This passage, but also some other scenes dedicated both to the education of adults and to the medical services provided by the Italian administration, feature an accurate *mise-en-scène*, a perfectly crafted composition, and vivid Ferraniacolor images and lighting. As soon as the documentary reaches its last section, the atmosphere becomes remarkably “exotic.” The formal accuracy of the images disguises the attempt to justify the Italian presence in the post-colonial context. The future independence of Somalia is mentioned fleetingly. Although the voice-over states that Italy’s activities are pivotal to “contribuire al futuro assetto del paese” (“help the future order of the country”), this does not necessarily lead to the successful completion of the path toward Somali’s self-government, because the “compito è arduo, la natura degli uomini e le condizioni ambientali sono ostacoli gravi” (“the task is hard, the inner nature of people and the environmental conditions are severe obstacles [to their self-government]”). Accordingly, *Somalia d’oggi* re-advocates the essentialized nature of African people and landscapes as well as the factual impossibility of fully freeing them from their innate, backward condition.

Such a disparaging attitude is mediated in the British and French representations of their trusteeships. Even though the agency of African people stands more palpably out, the conceptual framework within which former subjects move does not entail the complete emancipation from their allegedly backward condition. The British Pathé newsreels stemming from the CFU footage *Weaving in Togoland* are a case in point: the ethnographic and “cataloguing” gaze is substantial from the first frames, where the camera lingers on the inhabitants of the village of Amajofi, who are shot dressing in “tribal” clothes while gathering cotton. The tools they use to spin are simple and handmade. This exotic portrayal changes with the introduction of a big weaving loom by the British administration. People look at the loom astonishingly, and the close-up on their faces conveys such an amazed atmosphere. Then some other local people, now dressed in “Western” clothes, teach their fellows how to weave properly. Another scene from this film is closely reminiscent of the Italian footage

in *Somalia d'oggi*, in that it features the educational path for African pupils who acquire order and discipline. The footage, however, portrays the leisure time at the end of the working and school day—introduced by the caption “after the day’s work”—as strongly exoticized. The reappearance of “primitive” traits—such as unbridled dances, bare-chested bodies, smiling faces being surprised by the camera—materializes the attempt to avoid any reference to the decolonial momentum, instead eliciting a renewed exotic desire.

On the eve of independence, these exotic descriptions started to fade. A report from *Actualités Françaises*<sup>6</sup> epitomizes this changing iconographic lexicon, the service entitled *Le Cameroun d'aujourd'hui* (Cameroon today, FR, 1957) focuses on the agricultural resources of the African country especially related to the cultivation of bananas, coffee, and pineapples. Further scenes are on wood and water resources, which will guarantee the economic development of Cameroon. In these passages, however, the commentary makes clear that training and technical support is provided by French administrators and technologies<sup>7</sup>; likewise, the end of the film makes clear that “Ces images sont l’illustration d’un dossier que la France, s’il était nécessaire, pourrait plaider bien haut devant les instances internationales” (“These images are the illustration of a report that France, if necessary, can proudly utter [to defend its activity] within international contexts”). The film thus obliterates any reference to the fact that France was vehemently opposing the call for independence coming from the Union des population du Cameroun—a nationalist movement with a strong communist component—that, since the late 1940s, was fighting to revise the terms of the trusteeship with the aim of reaching independence in a reasonable time (Terretta 2010; DeLancey, Neh Mbuh, and DeLancey 2010; Joseph 1974). The voice-over mentioning that the images might be seen as the “réplique la plus formelle aux dénigrements systématiques de certaines puissances, dont le niveau de vie atteint à peine le stade élémentaire” (“the most formal

6 *Actualités Françaises* was one of the main French newsreels, broadcasting news films between 1945 and 1969. In the aftermath of WWII, when the monopoly was rejected, it competed with other companies like Pathé, Éclair, and Gaumont, though it remained very close to the political agenda of successive French governments (De la Bretèque 1996; Huret 1984).

7 It is worth mentioning here the story of what might be regarded the first French anti-colonial film, entitled *Afrique 50* by René Vautier (FR, 1950). The French League of Education commissioned a film able to highlight the allegedly “educational benefits” of the colonial system in French West Africa. However, Vautier turned his film into a direct accusation of the French colonial power and of its legacies. For this reason, he was imprisoned, and the film was banned for about forty years (Nicolas, Riot, and Bancel 2016).

reply to the systematic denigration of certain powers, whose standard of living has barely reached the elementary stage”) confirms that the French repressive activity was well known internationally (the Soviet Union, Syria, Egypt, and Ghana, among others, criticized the violent repression by France to UPC activities).

A very similar discourse on cooperation is featured in a medium-length Italian film entitled *Somalia. Missione conclusa* (Somalia: Mission accomplished, IT, 1960), produced by the Servizio informazioni della Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri (Information Office of the Prime Minister of Italy) to celebrate the end of AFIS. Long aerial sequences introduce the audience to the Somali landscape, while the voice-over describes cities, rivers, and deserts. Such an ethnographic and cataloguing gaze slowly morphs into the description of agricultural and industrial plants developed by Italians during the past colonial rule. However, any public repentance for, and reconciliation with, colonial crimes is carefully avoided. The focus is on the fact that Italians will continue to train the future local elite (for instance at the Istituto Universitario della Somalia, that is, the Italian University in Mogadishu) as well as to cooperate in addressing the economic development of the independent country. This rhetorical discourse on development and cooperation, which is featured to different degrees in all the footage about trusteeship administrations, allows the films to diffuse the traumatic effects of decolonization by exorcising the direct confrontation with the former subjects.

The same impression can also be drawn by watching the British Pathé films on the independence of Togoland (for instance, *Birth of a New State*, UK, 1957; *Celebration of Independence in Togoland*, UK, 1960), which feature images of celebrations also attended by British politicians. Similarly, the Italian newsreel about the end of AFIS, aired in July 1960, is about a party held in a luxurious palace in Rome. Somali, and Italian diplomats—dressed elegantly and holding shiny glasses of champagne—are pleasantly talking to each other; the whole atmosphere comes closer to a glamorous premiere than to a moment in which a colonial yoke is finally thrown off. The voice-over commentary is more eloquent than the images alone, uttering sentences like “Il nostro paese può guardare con orgoglio al lavoro svolto laggiù; caso un po’ raro oggi, quello di uno stato che vada d’accordo con la sua ex-colonia” (“Italy can be proud of the work it has done down there; it is uncommon today seeing a state that gets along with its former colony”). This film, but also those addressing British and French audiences, hence assumed that former colonial subjects did not suffer any traumatic experience during the colonial rule; on the other hand,

the reprojection in Africa is represented as able to somatize the long and intersecting collective traumas caused by the collapse of the empires and by the consequences of WWII. Therefore, any traumatic result related to these experiences was meant to vanish in the images of the benevolent impact Western countries had on Africans. The former colonizers presented themselves as bearers of democracy, independence, and development. The footage on trusteeships is thus part of the plethora of political, cultural, and social practices that *actively* contributed to disconnecting European societies and cultures from any form of critical appraisal of, or repentance for, colonial usurpation.

Even though the rhetoric of development and related scenes—on the education of African people, on Western technologies implemented in the former colonies, on the positive impact that European countries could have in Africa—are common traits linking British, French, and Italian productions, there are some structural differences in the conceptualization of the post-colonial relationship. France and the United Kingdom were already facing violent uprisings from their former colonies (Indochina, Algeria, the Suez Crisis), and the images coming from the entrusted territories had to strengthen the idea that a partial reform of the imperial structure (like the *Commonwealth* or the *Union Française*) could have been the only viable way to avoid the dreadful consequences engendered by the withdrawal of former colonial powers. On the other hand, Italian postwar governments conceived of the footage (and, broadly speaking, the discourse on the former colonies) as a means of forgetting the Fascist phase, reprojecting the nation into Africa after the Fascist parenthesis. The representation of the Italian activities during AFIS is hence egocentric and ego-exploring: there is an almost complete negligence of Africans' agency; they are a passive part of a scenery in which Italy performs a self-centered and even autistic exploration of its national identity, still embedded with fantasies of power and authority as it happened during the colonial phase (Bertellini 2003, 258).

### **Conclusion: Postwar and (Post)colonial Entanglements**

Speaking at the UN conference on January 1946, the UK minister for foreign affairs, Ernest Bevin, tackled the issue of the transformation of the League of Nations mandate system into the trusteeship by addressing the audience with the following words: “You cannot change the world in a moon, what this assembly can do is to prepare the soil in which great and little powers [...]

grow together, in a common endeavor for a mutual benefit.”<sup>8</sup> The so-called “preparation of the soil” meant, in fact, rearticulating a form of political and especially economic influence over some territories and populations that, instead, were increasingly calling for independence. As we have seen throughout, the representations of trusteeship administrations produced in Italy, France, and the UK between 1946 and the late 1950s, however, did not convey a mere account of the tortuous transition from colonialism to independence, but they entailed an overall reconsideration of the role that crumbling European empires could play in the new Cold War order.

The footage epitomizes a discourse according to which the colonial past acted surreptitiously in conveying meanings about the past *and* the future presence of Western countries in Africa. These meanings were, however, changing; the political stance typical of the interwar/imperial period started to fade. This led to a slow but unescapable conceptual shift concerning the ways in which to represent Africa and, especially, the “familiar yet exotic” space that used to be part of the empires. The films acknowledge an emergent, though still incomplete, form of African agency, although former colonial powers remain the ultimate beneficiary of that discourse. In a rather egotistical narrative circle, the Western authority in Africa is depicted as moral, cultural, and economic, rather than merely political. As a result, representing the persistence of ties and cooperation policies with the soon-to-be post-colonial world not only served to avoid the direct confrontation with violence and usurpation that characterized the colonial period, but it helped to refashion ideas of national qualities in the metropolitan centers. This is especially evident if we look at the Italian case, where the end of the colonial presence in Africa was anything but straightforward, since it occurred during Italy’s transition from Fascism to the Republic after WWII, a shift which shattered and divided the country.

It is undeniable that Italian, French, and British trusteeships shared a common determination to rearticulate a colonial-like setting in terms of epistemic, economic, and political categories to be imposed in the entrusted territories. They, however, diverged in the modalities of implementing the trusteeship system. This is most likely because the United Kingdom and France were already experiencing some structural changes in the management of their empires, and of their end. In these countries, anti-colonial movements started to arise, the idea of the development of colonized societies was slowly yet inexorably acknowledged, and the call for reform

8 Unused British Pathé footage, <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/bevin-speech-at-un/togoland>.

of imperial relationships had been advocated since the interwar period (Murphy 2018; Aldrich 2002). Furthermore, both Togoland and Cameroon were under the previous League of Nations mandate. Postwar Italy, instead, lost its colonies *manu militari*; this allowed politics and society to avoid facing anti-colonial struggles and discourses, which spread belatedly and not so much in relation with the national colonial past but to internationalism and Third Worldism (Srivastava 2018). This led to a difficult and only partial reconsideration of the colonial past, which was instead selectively used to support the claims during the diplomatic actions at the Paris Peace Conference. On that occasion, Italy's governments vehemently opposed the idea of reforming their colonial relationships (Morone 2019), and this element sneakily resonated in the ways in which the period of AFIS was represented in the peninsula (Mancosu 2021).

Despite such differences, French, British, and Italian films present several similarities in terms of both production mechanisms—still influenced by governments' agendas—and of aesthetic choices. As a whole, they slowly became less concerned with addressing an insurmountable divide between colonizers and colonized, and keener to acknowledge how “instances of colonialism and postcolonialism are interconnected, often overlapping, and continuously interacting” (Ponzanesi and Waller 2012). The new presence in Africa is described as being inspired by values such as international cooperation, democracy, and self-determination; nevertheless, para-colonial footage resorted to an aesthetic lexicon typical of the *mission civilisatrice*, which praised European technical superiority and industriousness and re-proposed the exotic backwardness of Africans, who are still conceived of as unable to take care of themselves properly. In so doing, the footage “dismembers” the historical result of the past colonial relationships by selectively portraying the allegedly positive results only. Therefore, colonial memories and legacies surfacing from films did not simply redefine the connection with that past, but fashioned a given image of the present and future of European metropolitan centers in the post-colonial world, hence defining once again their qualities and distinctive superiority. To many people in postwar European countries, their colonies and imperial holdings in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas “were balm for the suffering and humiliations of the war in Europe” (Judt 2005, 278). Postwar nations hence tried to somatize intersecting forms of trauma, dealing not simply with the shattered political and economic condition the war had left, but also with the “dramatic loss of wealth, status, power and pride” caused by the perspective of the incumbent collapse of their empires (Assmann 2015). The analytical

perspective inspiring this contribution has allowed us to conceptualize how mass culture products coped with different forms of reconstruction concerning the political, economic, and cultural relationship European states established with the newly independent countries (Sebè and Stanard 2020). In this respect, a transnational and comparative perspective has been deemed as instrumental in understanding not simply commonalities in terms of production mechanisms and representational discourses, but especially the extent to which those moving images fed the restructuring of postwar national (and Western) identities.

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# Section 4

Creating New Paths



This final section of the volume looks at how archival footage and non-fiction films produced at the end of the Second World War and during the postwar reconstruction are used in contemporary film projects and/or are digitally disseminated. The three contributions are respectively framed in memorial, curatorial, and educational perspectives.

Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Fabian Schmidt propose to consider the films shot during the liberation of the concentration camps as “mobile models” that would prefigure contemporary virtual reconstructions. Recalling that these images shot by the liberating Allies also constitute the very last visual traces of them before their destruction, their chapter explores this dissociation between the physical location of the atrocities committed and the portable material medium of film. It contrasts the atrocity films produced by the Allies from the images of the liberation of the concentration camps with contemporary documentary productions and even with a video game, to question the way in which the cinematic march of the soldier-operators and the virtual reconstruction of a vanished or completely transformed place allow remote access to the camps and provide access to an understanding of their reality.

The following two contributions come from members of the ViCTOR-E team. They report on the reflections carried out in the context of the online exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction: Realities and Visions of Recovering Europe. Documentary Film in Postwar Visual Culture* and the accompanying tool kit. Rossella Catanese and Andrea Průchová Hřůzová highlight the challenges and opportunities enabled by an online valorization of digitized films. Using the format of the online exhibition, they detail how the objects were selected and how they were displayed together. They raise questions related to the transnational, multimedia, and multidimensional way of digital curating. In the continuity of this reflection around the valorization and accessibility of postwar non-fiction films, Ondřej Haváč and Paolo Villa focus more specifically on the pedagogical kit developed in parallel with the exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*. They show how non-fiction cinema represents a valuable tool for teaching history in secondary schools and universities. Using case studies from Italy and the Czech Republic, they emphasize that by studying history with and through films (in this case postwar films), students develop knowledge that also shapes their understanding and use of contemporary media. These three chapters explore a variety of media that extend these films while allowing contemporary viewers to discover, question, and reappropriate them.



# 15. Virtual Topographies of Memory

Liberation Films as Mobile Models of Atrocity Sites<sup>1</sup>

*Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Fabian Schmidt*

## Abstract

The films and footage, which the Allies recorded in the liberated concentration and extermination camps as well as at other atrocity sites, shaped the future iconography of the camps. Using imagery from various camps, later film compilations created “virtual” sites that served as typifying representations of “the” concentration camp. This chapter intends to review atrocity footage and its later use as constitutive elements of such virtual topographies. By analyzing the raw footage as it is preserved in archives dispersed around the world, early atrocity films, documentary compilations, virtual models, video games, digital tours, and online platforms, we demonstrate how the historical visual evidence of the camps turned into mobile virtual models of destroyed or lost visible traces of former concentration camps.

**Keywords:** Holocaust, concentration camp, archive footage, documentary film, digital memory, video games

## Introduction

Shortly after British troops discovered and liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp close to the northern German city of Celle in mid-April 1945, the site’s topography fundamentally changed. After clearing the site, the British decided to burn the remaining camp facilities and bury the

<sup>1</sup> Research for this article was conducted as part of the “Visual History of the Holocaust: Rethinking Curation in the Digital Age” project, which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822670. [www.vhh-project.eu](http://www.vhh-project.eu).



massive number of corpses they had found there to prevent the spreading of diseases. Roughly five weeks later, the huts and barracks were torched with flamethrowers in a symbolic act. Visitors to the memorial today can merely surmise the topographic dimensions of the former camp. They are greeted, in fact, by green meadows and woods, a landscape transformed into a commemoration site, while the remnants of the original compound are nearly invisible. Film footage recorded by British camera teams after the liberation of the camp—including films that depict the burning of the camp's barracks—is the only visible reminder of its topography today. It functions as a source for a portable model of the camp, a virtual site of memory, which was fundamentally transformed after the end of the war.

Before being recorded on film, the atrocity sites—especially at former concentration and extermination camps—represented “three-dimensional, authentic evidence” (Agde 2006, 23), which often served for direct demonstration purposes during the early visits by international politicians and journalists or local inhabitants. Research about the footage from the liberated camps mostly followed in the footsteps of this evidence paradigm. Scholars reviewed and analyzed visual depictions from the liberated camps—photographs and films alike—primarily as evidence, which was intended to prove the crimes committed by Germans in the name of the Nazi ideology either as part of the indictment in court proceedings and trials or as a visual accusation addressed to the German public and former German soldiers in prisoners of war (POW) camps. In this context, the shocking character of the footage appears less as evidence but instead as a moral accusation and a nucleus for shaming perpetrators and bystanders (Weckel 2012). The evidence paradigm, as opposed to that, is primarily based on the famous statement with which US Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson introduced and legitimized the use of films as a “witness” in the Nuremberg tribunal:

We will show you these concentration camps in motion pictures, just as the Allied armies found them when they arrived. [...] Our proof will be disgusting and you will say I have robbed you of your sleep. [...] I am one who received during this war most atrocity tales with suspicion and skepticism. But the proof here will be so overwhelming that I venture to predict not one word I have spoken will be denied. (Quoted in Douglas 1995, 450)

There is, however, another way to look at and understand those images, and that is as a transportable medium that represents an absent event at a

different location. As Jackson stated, “We will show you these concentration camps in motion pictures,” as if the judges, prosecutors, and attorneys could visit and survey the sites through a film screening. Correspondingly, in his essay on the Nuremberg evidence film *Nazi Concentration Camp* (OMGUS, 1945), Lawrence Douglas evokes crime scene photography as a reference to the showing of atrocity films in court (Douglas 1995, 451). Crime scene photography is a significant mode of translating the visual topography of a crime scene into a transportable medium that can be analyzed by the investigators at a different place and a different moment in time. Thus, photography, but also drawings or films, serve as transportable assets that virtually evoke the crime scene to a distant audience.

Similarly, the film recordings from the liberated camps had the purpose of documenting the topography of atrocity sites and turning them into transportable assets that could then later constitute portable memories. This “virtual sum” of the atrocity sites, however, remained fragmented and “a puzzle with significant voids” (Agde 2010–11, 98). The filming, however, resulted in “exemplary images of visual violence,” which served as cinematic “inventory” (Agde 2010–11, 104), significantly shaping the iconography of the camps. They were used repeatedly to represent “typical” atrocity sites. Using footage from various camps in a typifying approach, later film compilations then created a “virtual” site that served as a heterotopical representation of “the” concentration camp. This chapter intends to review atrocity footage and its later use as constitutive elements of such virtual topographies. These topographies dissociate themselves from the physical place and transfer the original material sites into a generalized virtual model. The outcome is a kind of prototype that affects the representation of atrocity sites within collective memory after the physical evidence of the crimes has vanished or was transformed by architectures of commemoration.

### Film Topographies of Atrocity

The film *Dachau Concentration Camp* (FRG, 2021) by Clemens von Wedemeyer, Maya Schweizer, and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer opens with a top shot of an aerial map of the camp. The camera slowly zooms into the map, which transforms into a 3D model that opens the view towards the camp’s gate and an alley between the barracks. While delving into the model that had evolved from the map, the shot is superimposed with liberation footage filmed from a plane flying over the camp. The opening sequence thus emphasizes the connection between topographic mapping and the

filmic depiction of the atrocity sites. In combining digital modeling with the footage taken by Allied camera teams, the documentary realizes the potentiality implied in the atrocity footage to create film topographies of atrocity that would make it possible to access the cinematic preservation of these sites from distant places and times.

In many cases, the films made by Allied cameramen are the only visual testimony of the camp topography as it looked at the moment of liberation. From the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, for instance, “a pictorial record of the camp exists from the moment it was liberated by the British army, to the moment it was razed to the ground” (Caven 2001, 205). The footage, which was originally intended to be used in a film that was never fully completed and only reconstructed in 2014 with the title *German Concentration Camps: A Factual Survey* (dir. Sidney Bernstein, UK, 2014), documented and preserved the conditions in the camp as found by the British after its liberation. Later research on the filming emphasized the intention to create evidence that could not be questioned or denied. The focus on civilians witnessing the shocking number of dead bodies or the use of panning shots to prove that the footage was not edited were seen as proof of this kind of visible evidence production. The panning shots, however, can also be conceptualized as attempts to measure and map the territory of the camp. Films from other locations further support this assumption that filming in the camps was also a way of exploring the topographies of atrocity sites and of preserving them for the future.

Cinematic mapping techniques such as panning or tracking shots that resemble the mode of touring through the camps are even more explicit in private films taken by Allied soldiers. In May 1945, Sergeant Raymond S. Buch from the 56th Armored Engineer Battalion of the US Army, for instance, filmed in the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Overlooking the quarry, Buch measures the distances of the camp's site with the help of an extremely long panning shot. He then depicts the interior of the camp with the help of a panning shot alongside a barbed wire fence. Covering a 180-degree half-circle, Buch combines the two visual axes of a street next to the camp's fence in a single shot. He documents the former prisoners and the conditions in the camp in relation to its topography. Specific architectural structures such as the barracks and the fence as well as streets and walkways constitute the reference points of this cinematic mapping technique.

A similar technique of measuring and mapping the topography of a concentration camp with the help of a mobile camera can be seen in the opening sequence of Romuald Karmakar's documentary *Land der Vernichtung* (Land of annihilation, FRG, 2003), in which he explores landscapes of

Eastern Europe by mapping the places of Nazi atrocities and portraying the people still living next to them. Using a simple MiniDV camera, Karmakar walks along the fence of the former death camp Majdanek. The viewer hears Karmakar's voice counting the steps. The duration of the take and Karmakar's counting create an experience of a length of time in relation to the topography of the historical place depicted by the camera. Being confronted with the dimension of the camp's fence, listening to the constantly counting voice, and being bound to the point-of-view perspective, the mobile camera becomes an instrument for mapping the landscapes of German atrocities.

In the American films depicting the liberated Buchenwald concentration camp, Agde also identified this explorative movement: the cameramen recorded the site according to their own walkthrough through the camp. Their exploration of the atrocity site is thereby mirrored in the footage itself (Agde 2010–11, 102). The cameras primarily measure the site and include the buildings and structures as visual demarcations for a film topography. The understandable desire of the filming soldiers to give an overview on the site led to a couple of iconic images. A spatially structuring effect on the collective imagery of the camps can be attributed to the often used shots from the watchtowers overlooking the camp—some including a machine gun—that document the almost panoptic perspective these towers allowed for. In a similar sense, the aerial shot of Auschwitz showing rows and rows of barracks behind barbed wire gained iconic status. While the purpose of these shots was to illustrate the enormous dimensions of the camps, today they contribute to the visual memory of concentration camps with long rows of barracks and muddy alleys, which are echoed in feature films and computer games.

Another Signal Corps routine is the gaze into the barrack that initially often serves the purpose of showing traces of the atrocities but also allows the viewer to experience the architectural details and spatial dimensions of the barracks. However, the uncut footage of the Signal Corps shows an even more complete picture of the camps and the proceedings around the liberation than the first compilation films or the frequently used shots in documentaries allow for. The original footage preserves a precarious spatiality, as the camps were often only separated from the adjacent villages with their houses and gardens by barbed wire fences. Specifically, the shots that show how close the next villages were—a repeatedly occurring routine—did not become part of the collective imagery.<sup>2</sup>

2 It should be noted that despite the inquiring approach, almost none of the existing footage tries to record the gaze of the interned, for example, in terms of looking outside the barracks.

## Transportable Sites of Atrocity

When *Die Todesmühlen* (Death mills, dir. Hanuš Burger, DE-West, 1945) was produced by the American Information Control Division (ICD)<sup>3</sup> during the second half of 1945, the Allies already had experience with re-education films about concentration camps. No less than seven such educational films had already circulated: three Soviet films (*Oswiecim* [Auschwitz, USSR, 1945], *Majdanek—cmentarzysko Europy* [Majdanek, cemetery of Europe, USSR, 1944] and *Kinodokumenty o zverstvakh nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov* [Film documents of the atrocities of the German fascist invaders, USSR, 1945]), one French production (*Les Camps de la mort* [The death camps, FR, June 1945]), and three US films (*KZ, Deutschland erwache*, and *Nazi Concentration Camps*).<sup>4</sup> While the editing of *KZ, Nazi Concentration Camps*, and *Les Camps de la mort* was mainly oriented along a systematic approach of using Signal Corps footage to cover each liberated camp separately, *Die Todesmühlen* and its English-language version entitled *Death Mills*<sup>5</sup> transcended this concept and instead used the footage to construct a general portrait of a system of similar concentration camps. Analyzing these two films and their effect on the visual memory of the camps calls for a brief look at their differences. The English-language version *Death Mills* is unquestionably by far the better known and more easily accessible version today; hence, most scholars refer to this version as if it were simply an English dub of *Die Todesmühlen*. The attitude is supported by a title card at the beginning of the English-language version stating: “This is a translation of a film called *Death Mills*.” Although the film could be perceived as a translation of *Die Todesmühlen*, this wording is misleading since the English voice-over has not just been translated but rather transformed for the specific purpose to inform members of the Allied forces about the camps. *Death Mills* explicitly addresses an Allied audience, and the voice-over warns the audience not to fraternize with these Germans lightly.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, in *Die Todesmühlen*, the German narration—especially towards the end of the film—becomes

3 The ICD was a department of the Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS) during an early phase of the postwar American occupation of Germany following World War II.

4 SHAEF and the British military planned but never finished their own projects. The latter was later released in a shorter form as *Memory of the Camps* and the original production reconstructed in 2017 under the original title *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*.

5 The Yiddish version *Di Toit Milen* (BArch B-71053) is using the score and, with minor exceptions, the editing of *Die Todesmühlen*.

6 “Today, these Germans who cheered the destruction of humanity in your land (...) plead for your sympathy. They are the same Germans who once said: ‘Heil Hitler!’”

self-accusatory and addresses remorseful perpetrators and “*Mitläufer*” (supporters). The two films also differ slightly regarding the editing, the choice of material, and the pacing on a micro-level. Yet while they have different approaches in terms of audience identification, both versions are similar in the way they construct “the concentration camp.” Hence, both versions will be referenced in alternation to acknowledge their differences, but they will be collectively referred to as “ICD films” when analyzing the strategy of constructing a portable memory of the camps, which both versions share. This approach offers an additional benefit that has been overlooked by scholars so far. *Death Mills* is not only an English-language adaptation of *Die Todesmühlen* that caters to Allied personnel. With regards to its basic visual concept, it is a revised version that makes a handful of edits. Therefore, a comparison of both films can help to understand the makers’ original intentions concerning the construction of the image of a model camp.

As emphasized above, all earlier films such as *Nazi Concentration Camps* or *Les Camps de la mort* presented a series of case studies. Organized by chapters that each represented specific camps, the audience was supposed to draw the conclusion of a scheme and picture a network of many more such places all over Germany and in the former occupied territories. The narration of *Nazi Concentration Camps* invites its audience to take the individual and diverse cases as examples of equally horrible scenarios all over Europe, which a map of Europe in the opening title makes unambiguously clear. Contrary to that, both ICD films (*Death Mills* and *Die Todesmühlen*) present at least parts of the Signal Corps’ and Soviet liberation footage in an already generalized and typified form. While the generically dramatizing music accompanying the German-language version partially obscures this, the repetitive score in the English-language version emphasizes the structural austerity of the montage, which is the main adjustment in comparison to the German-language version. In *Death Mills*, a simple and repeated march throughout the twenty minutes mimics the strict and redundant structure of the movie. The rudimentary musical score consists of a suspenseful walking bass figure plucked by an orchestral string section, a seemingly endless relay of descending and ascending steps that are heard on repeat over the course of the film. Undoubtedly, the march echoes the rhythm of the ominous procession of Germans carrying crosses in Gardelegen, which functions as a framing story of the film.

This representation of perpetrators and bystanders carrying crosses is ambiguous at the least and evokes notions of suffering and of “putting your trust in God in times of hardship.” It is reminiscent of an almost ironic

comment on the self-victimization of Germans, and the heroic fanfare mocks it as a procession of self-pity. The ongoing marching score eventually connects the whole film with this framing story as if the procession walked along the stations the film shows. Additionally, the repetitive score adds to a leveling out of the often strong visual differences between the film materials. In the German-language version *Die Todesmühlen*, however, the score instead works against the categorial structuring of the footage. Here, the music supports a narrative formed by the voice-over that is merely illustrated by the images. While the earlier re-education films are visually consistent, with each chapter using material from one camera operator in a specific weather condition, the ICD films make use of the opposite effect. The introductory montage with barbed wire fences combines materials from Poland and Germany, intercuts footage from the liberation of Majdanek in the summer with snowy images from Struthof in November, and juxtaposes high contrast extreme long shots and blurry close-ups. This exact mixture defines the approach applied; it is not about the many individual camps but about “*the* concentration camp”: an interchangeable place that is fenced in by barbed wire and watch towers, inhabited by poor, wretched, emaciated creatures in striped uniforms, lying within plain sight of the next village, while at the same time shut off from the world with large gates, furnished by signs in German or Polish and—seemingly intentionally—often situated in typical German landscapes such as hilly regions or at the edge of a forest.

These first images of the film show deserted places. They look like model camps, which emphasizes their virtual character. Only when the first gate opens, large groups of inmates, cheering at their liberators, come into sight. Then more gates are opened and several crowds of cheering prisoners, waving through barbed wire fences, populate the yards of “the camp.” Exhausted inmates from several camps are carried away on stretchers, followed by a montage with half a dozen delegations visiting camps in Germany and Poland. The ICD films’ montage combines US army officers entering the premises in Flossenbürg with the Eisenhower delegation visiting Ohrdruf as if it were the same event. While General Eisenhower and the Archbishop of Canterbury are identified by the narrator, the following montage combines footage of emissaries looking on and shots of devastated barracks or piles of corpses from other locations, intentionally edited in a random fashion. Similar attempts at a cinematic construction of “the concentration camp” are found in the introduction of Alain Resnais’s seminal short film *Nuit et brouillard* (Night and fog, FR, 1956) ten years later. But the ICD films shift this construction of a virtual space to another level. Layer by layer, the camp is unveiled until the viewer reaches the gas chambers, and eventually the vaults

and sheds with innumerable items and possessions of those murdered. While the voice-over often identifies places and makes distinctions, the editing of *Death Mills* and *Die Todesmühlen* arranges and juxtaposes footage from various places and therefore creates virtual spaces. The piles of eyeglasses and dental prostheses from Lublin appear to be in the same room as the GI presenting the wedding rings or the men in overalls sorting the belongings of the dead in Buchenwald.

The films strictly adhere to the concept of typifying the footage. The passage with the belongings is followed by one of atrocities before the liberation, which is succeeded by a passage with perpetrators, a sequence about the dead, and then one about the survivors. Even the montage with those who survived further intensifies the impression of a virtualization of the camp by presenting a kind of typified emaciated survivor. Eventually, the last four minutes deal with civilians confronting the atrocities in Ohrdruf, Buchenwald, and other places; and again, this points to spatial aspects: the closeness of the adjacent settings, the final combination of all aspects: corpses, camps, survivors. Once again, the films intentionally cut from the gazes of people visiting Buchenwald to corpses discovered at a different place in order to illustrate the interchangeability of the sites of terror and the practice of confronting German denial with graphic images of the atrocities.

The changes made in the later English-language version *Death Mills* are telling corrections. While some of the differences are minor makeovers, the English-language version rectifies the typified montages further in at least two cases. Two shots of dead inmates have been cut from a passage with survivors during the liberation in the first half. The same happens in the second half of the film when a single shot with a survivor is cut from a sequence with corpses.<sup>7</sup> The most prominent correction, however, is the elimination of the emotionalizing score and its replacement with a connective, repetitive theme. All these changes show how important the categorizing structure of the footage was considered. Taking all these observations into account, one could conclude that both *Death Mills* and *Die Todesmühlen*—despite the opposing audiences they anticipated—aimed

7 Intriguingly this shot is visible in the video-recording of the showing of *Death Mills/Die Todesmühlen* during the Eichmann Trial. It is therefore likely that the German-language version was screened without sound in 1961. However, the same video also shows an animated map of Germany and Poland with locations of concentration camps, which has not been preserved in any of the known ICD films. So far, there is not any document proving that *Death Mills* had been screened at all. The succession of shots visible in the video recording of the Eichmann trial, however, leaves no doubt that this was the case.



at producing a virtual cinematic construction of “the concentration camp.” Moving away from a case-oriented use in favor of a generalizing visualization, this utilization of film as a portable memory differs from evidencing or documenting. Instead, the memory of the camps is transformed into a transferable, virtual, heterotopic entity. Therefore, the compilation of images from several camps in documentaries, often criticized as random utilization, could also be understood as a continuation of this virtualization of the concentration camp as a transportable memory. While the criticism of the use of liberation footage, as Toby Haggith (2005) refers to as “illustrative wallpaper” in his analysis of the Bergen-Belsen films, is justified when this use is compared to the materials’ specific documentary value, exactly this detachment might be one of the conditions of the construction of transportable memory and perhaps proves to be a successful and enduring approach within the context of the formation of Holocaust remembrances.

Intriguingly, the Soviet film about the concentration camp in Lublin from 1944 is titled *Majdanek* and not *KL Lublin*, as the camp was officially called by the German administration. This name was most likely given by the locals, referring to the location of the former Lublin ghetto Majdan Tatarski (Drubek-Meyer 2020, 17). This name, therefore, deprives the title of any geographical roots recognizable to audiences outside of Lublin. Arguably this could be interpreted as an early attempt to virtualize the camps, and more aspects hint to such an agenda. The Polish-language version of the movie even starts with a fictional sign referring to “Vernichtungslager Majdanek” with a skull and the runic insignia of the Schutzstaffel “SS” that was produced as a prop for the film. The movie’s second title, *Europe’s Cemetery*, underlines this generalizing approach, which arguably explains the absence of any reference to Jewish victims, a deliberate choice of the censors in Moscow, most likely also due to the wartime situation and Stalin’s agenda. This typifying approach is also present in the unremarked combination of images from the Majdanek concentration camp and from the “Erfassungslager für beschlagnahmtes Feindvermögen”<sup>8</sup> located in Chopinstr. 27 in the city center, miles away from the concentration camp. The “Erfassungslager” was a central collecting point for “Effekten” from the extermination camps in Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and the Majdanek concentration camp. Majdanek also had its own *Effektenkammer*, yet, as reconstructed by Natascha Drubek-Meyer, at least the close-ups in Majdanek were filmed in the store in the city (Drubek-Meyer 2020, 6). However, the

8 Sometimes referred to as “Lager” or “Materiallager Chopinstraße.” See: <http://www.holocaust-researchproject.org/economics/economicsgal/Chopin%20Street%20%20loot%20invoice.html>.

footage of vast amounts of belongings being piled up in front of the barracks taken from *Majdanek* and also used in *Death Mills* most likely was filmed in yet a third location, the labor camp at the old Lublin airport called “Bekleidungs-lager Lublin,”<sup>9</sup> where less valuable items like shoes were hoarded. Hence, the virtualization of the camps had already started when the Signal Corps units began to film, and the utilization of the Soviet footage in *Death Mills* and *Die Todesmühlen* was an appropriation of footage that had already been stripped of its provenance in a prior attempt at virtualizing the camps.

### Mapping Atrocities through Film

In light of a growing number of digital projects that attempt to reconstruct the history and memory of the Holocaust, including historical sites, virtuality is usually seen as synonymous with the digital. However, Victoria Walden recently suggested a different understanding of virtual Holocaust memory. She suggests that such a different understanding of virtuality “can help us to understand a particular methodology for remembering this past that persists across a range of technologies and forms” (Walden 2022, 626). By rethinking the notion of the virtual within the context of (visual) Holocaust memory beyond the distinction between analog and digital, the atrocity films from the liberated concentration camps can be conceptualized as a substitute for their lost, destroyed, or transformed materiality. This corresponds to Anne Friedberg’s definition of the virtual as a “substitute” that acts as “an immaterial proxy for the material,” and thus indicates a changing “relationship between the real and its copy, the original and its reproduction,” which Friedberg describes as being of “secondary order” (Friedberg 2006, 8). The films from the camps serve as such a proxy. They constitute secondary order representations of atrocity sites that cannot be physically accessed anymore.

Their potential as a virtual substitute, however, can be realized in different ways. On the one hand, cinematic dramatizations such as *Schindler’s List* (dir. Steven Spielberg, US, 1993) reenact atrocity footage or indirectly refer to iconic images and tropes in order to generate a generic topography of concentration camps (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2015). Indirectly utilizing liberation footage that migrates into cinematic depictions of concentration camps, such as in the German film *Der Neunte Tag* (The ninth day, dir. Volker

9 The “Bekleidungs-lager” can be found in Globocnic’s stafflist: <http://www.deathcamps.org/lublin/pic/globuslist.jpg>.

Schlöndorff, FRG, 2004) about Dachau, contributes to a virtual iconography of the camps (Ebbrecht 2011, 202). On the other hand, films that not only utilize the actual footage but also indicatively contextualize and explore it, can help mapping Nazi atrocities temporarily, geographically, and visually, thereby realizing the potential of these films to create virtual topographies of memory. An example of that would be *1945: L'ouverture des camps en Allemagne* (1945: The opening of the camps in Germany, FR, 2013), an episode of the French TV series *Mystères des archives*, which deals in particular with the history of the liberated concentration camps by investigating Allied atrocity films. In doing so, *L'ouverture des camps* does not use the footage in an illustrating manner to create a generic image of the concentration camps. Additional markers emphasize attempts at indexing the images, indicating their temporality and locating them geographically. By precisely segmenting the footage and annotating it, the film turns it into a multimodal virtual reconstruction of the events in 1945. Based on the footage filmed at the Ohrdruf concentration camp near Gotha, *L'ouverture des camps* reconstructs a place that significantly shaped the global memory of the liberated camps, while the place itself was practically forgotten. The camp was erected on November 6, 1944, and was cleared by the Germans only six months later, shortly before the Americans arrived on April 9, 1945. After the war, the site turned into a military compound, first used by the Soviet Army and after German unification by the Federal Defense Forces, with nearly no material remnants in evidence of the camp's existence. Ohrdruf vanished from German memory, but with the help of the Allied films, it continued to exist virtually as a visual prototype of an atrocity site. *L'ouverture des camps* accesses the camp by depicting the former entrance gate followed by shots of barracks and piles of dead bodies. In this footage, specific sites are emphasized: a barrack—where the Allies discovered additional corpses—a funeral pyre, and a mass grave. Thereby, the film constructs a virtual topography, which is then geographically located with the help of an animated map that visualizes how Allied troops moved towards Germany. Visually exploring the footage showing General Eisenhower in Ohrdruf, *L'ouverture des camps* adopts the approach of a walkthrough that corresponds to the structure of Eisenhower's visit. Similar to a virtual tour, the film makes the camp accessible from a temporal and geographical distance while constantly emphasizing specific details and offering background information through reframing and augmenting the footage (figure 15.1).

The mode of a virtual tour is also prevalent in the next segment of the episode, which introduces the Buchenwald concentration camp. After entering the camp through an immersive tracking shot (which was most



Figure 15.1. Visual exploration of the footage organized as a virtual walkthrough in 1945. Still from *1945: L'ouverture des camps en Allemagne* (1945: The opening of the camps in Germany, FR, 2013), an episode of the French TV series *Mystères des archives*.

likely filmed from the top of an army truck), the voice-over locates the shots and explains the topography of the camp. In an attempt at explorative mapping, *L'ouverture des camps* continues to investigate the footage, focuses on details, and explains the historical context and structure of the camps, while an animated map locates different places and phases. In doing so, the film creates a multimodal environment for reconstructing the camp's history through reviewing and interrogating the historical footage in relation to the explanation and contextualization provided by the voice-over and additional visualizations such as animated maps that reinforce the film's character as a virtual substitute for a distant and inaccessible past.

## Virtual Landscapes

A discussion about the virtualization of concentration camps must also examine digital virtual worlds such as the settings of computer games situated in concentration camps. The action-adventure first-person shooter video game *Wolfenstein: The New Order* is set in a contrafactual universe in 1960, in which the Nazis are still in power. Having joined a resistance group, the main protagonist, veteran William "B. J." Blazkowitz, infiltrates a concentration camp as a forced laborer during a secret mission. B. J.'s briefing and the deportation to Camp Belica is part of a five-minute video sequence that introduces the background story and outlines the spatial composition of the camp.<sup>10</sup> B. J. is instructed by the leader of his resistance group on how to locate and save Set Roth from Camp Belica. Roth is a

<sup>10</sup> The video can be found on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukjoGASiGo4> (July 3, 2024).



Figure 15.2. Arrival by cargo train in Camp Belica while looking through the doors at the camp gate. Screenshot taken from the computer game *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (MachineGames/Bethesda Softworks 2014).

German Jewish scientist and a member of the Kreisau Circle captured in Łódź in 1941.<sup>11</sup> When B. J. starts the mission, the video cuts to the dark interior of a crowded cattle train. Doors then open, and a large group of prisoners with shaved heads pours out, welcomed by the beating of a sadistic female camp guard, Irene Engel,<sup>12</sup> and her assistant.

The prisoners are herded into the camp and then walk through a narrow aisle. B. J. is selected for work<sup>13</sup> and thrown into an empty room observed by a guard behind a glass pane. Here, a number is tattooed on B. J.'s right arm (Ebbrecht-Hartmann, Stiassny & Schmidt 2022). The overall insignificance of the number for the game itself points to a largely symbolic function that connects the game to the historical concentration camp system. This link is not merely evoked by the number tattoo but also by several other, primarily topographic aspects: the metal inscription on the gate that is reminiscent of the gates in Auschwitz and other camps, the location in Eastern Europe (Croatia), the segregation of the camp into “blocks” and the crematorium, the reference to Łódź, or the German Jewish descent of Set Roth to name a

11 Roth is believed to be a member of Da’at Yichud, an ancient Jewish order, predating all known religions and cultures. The inherent antisemitic allusions will not be examined here, but need to be acknowledged nonetheless. See [https://wolfenstein.fandom.com/wiki/Set\\_Roth](https://wolfenstein.fandom.com/wiki/Set_Roth).

12 Irene Engel most likely refers to Hildegard Lächert or Irene Haschke, both infamous blonde concentration camp guards.

13 The selection refers to the one at Auschwitz and other camps, when persons “fit” for work were divided from persons “unfit” for work, who were sent to the gas chambers immediately after arrival.

few examples.<sup>14</sup> While arrival and disembarkation bring to mind perpetrator footage such as the often cited, iconic deportation materials from Poland or even the Westerbork film (Schmidt 2020), the camp gate—clearly visible at first glance through the train’s open doors (figure 15.2)—evokes the memory of liberation films. This includes subtle architectural details such as the alley between the barbed wire fences known from the iconic footage with the child survivors from Auschwitz and metonymic signs such as the bunk beds in the barracks, piles of corpses, and other sights that can be traced to or understood as indirect uses of iconic images from the liberation films. Usually, the indirect or direct use of iconic images, such as the camp gate in a feature film, for example, functions much like establishing shots that frame the action. But since the computer game has to anticipate a nonlinear course of action that includes the possibility of a player roaming the site without completing the objectives, the designers integrated these references to iconic images of the Holocaust not only in the short introductory videos but into the regular gameplay, so that they keep reminding the player of the historical relation throughout the entire experience. Therefore, there is a second camp gate that connects the industrial plant with the yard in front of the shed with the bunk beds. Initially, this seems a little irritating but is surprisingly quite accurate in representing the division between industrial production, the systematic extermination, and the housing, typical of Auschwitz. However, neither the typical sheds, the barracks, nor the barbed wire fences surrounding the camp are part of the game design. All buildings are solid concrete or brick constructions. While in the embarkation scene the gate serves as a spatial orientation, it later appears as if re-spawned in a different spot of the camp area, where it affirms the anticipated Nazi concentration camp and the game’s historical ties, which would otherwise risk getting lost in the futuristic warfare design the *Wolfenstein* series fosters.

The many relations to liberation footage traceable in the game design prove its importance for the collective virtual imaginations of concentration camps, which were migrating virtual images long before they were integrated into computer games. The 3D world of Camp Belica that is also accessible to the player independently from and beyond the game’s diegesis<sup>15</sup> is taken from a heterotopical model of “the concentration camp” that has

14 Detailed information about the game’s background: <https://wolfenstein.fandom.com/wiki/>. It should be noted that not all of the information given here also plays an evenly important role in the game. While for example the camp Belica episode explicitly mentions that Set Roth was captured in Łódź, it doesn’t refer to him as Jewish. This information is provided by the game’s authors in the accompanying documentation.

15 The game allows the player to walk through the camp without pursuing any objectives.

been shaped through the indirect use of liberation footage known from documentaries and feature films. Specifically, the possibility to aimlessly roam the site has strong resemblances to virtual spaces derived from crime scene photography that also allow free movement through crime scenes. *Wolfenstein* distinguishes two temporal modes (present and past) and two modes of perspective (objective “sideline” camera and first-person perspective). Those correspond to two modes of interaction: passive watching and interactive play. The game includes quite a lot of transitional “full-motion video” film episodes. They range from briefings and transitional car rides to erotic encounters and even psychotic episodes with a distorted perception of time and vision, and they apply classical cinematic techniques such as editing, camera movement, and sound design. A skilled player can complete a walkthrough in five hours. The gameplay is interrupted more than fifty times by full-motion video sequences amounting to roughly ninety minutes of film or one-third of the whole game. Games like *Wolfenstein* seem, therefore, to be at least equivocally a subject of computer game research and film studies.

While the main part of the game takes place in the diegetic present, B. J. also experiences some flashbacks. And while the game’s dominant mode is the so-called first-person-shooter perspective, the introductory films and the flashbacks are mostly shot from an objective sideline perspective. The iconic or metaphoric images from the camps occur for the first time in the introductory video sequences, which evoke the style of a Hollywood feature film production through the use of cinematic techniques such as panning shots, handheld camera, the simulation of 35 mm objectives with short depth of field, and close-ups. Such cinematic context undoubtedly catalyzes the migration of images from the liberation films into the computer game. The combination of iconic concentration camp gate imagery and the reference to perpetrator films in the cargo train point of view, for example, reveals a certain familiarity of the game designers with the iconography of the Holocaust. But the image migration here goes beyond reuse. The gate of Camp Belica as a transition between the factory, on the one hand, and the barracks and crematoria, on the other, allows an integration of the iconic gate, which suddenly occurs as a three-dimensional artifact that can be accessed from two sides, therefore becoming part of the first-person game experience. This allows the camp gate to unfold its mnemonic capacity to a far greater extent compared to its first occurrence in the opening sequence. While most of the interiors consist of generic architectural assets such as stairs, hallways, doors, rooms, and windows with varying textures that no longer pierce the

gamer's attention during the repeated walkthroughs, iconic elements such as the gate with the metal writing or the smoking chimneys stick out and function as an orientation during the game but also have a contextualizing value by breaking through the immersive and to a certain degree numbing visual experience gradually. Hence, the camp gate is implemented and placed carefully as a subtle but repetitive stimulus within the otherwise rather mechanical and reflexively evolving gameplay. While Camp Belica explicitly refers to iconic images from the liberation films such as the camp gate or the bunk beds and even recreates the spatial organization of extermination and slave labor camps, it nonetheless also omits certain typical features such as the barracks or the barbed wire fence that allowed bystanders to see what happens in the camp from the outside. Camp Belica operates in secret and is surrounded by a concrete wall. Ultimately, the game designers perhaps shied away from placing the action in an Auschwitz replica. Nonetheless, the concentration camp iconography used in the architectural details triggers memories of terror that go beyond the game's diegesis. The outcome is a minimalistic digital model of a Nazi concentration camp, evoked by a few iconic images.

### Virtual Ecologies of Memory

Other than video games such as *Wolfenstein*, geolocation-based digital applications that attempt to make visible and accessible the topographies of former concentration camps through online and onsite tools have chosen less immersive approaches. Some of those applications explicitly integrate liberation footage or use this as a source and reference for reconstructing virtual topographies of memory. Borrowing a concept introduced by Andrew Hoskins (2016), we discuss three such applications in the following as virtual memory ecologies. Hoskins offers "'ecology' as a holistic perspective for revealing and imagining memory's multiple connections and functions" (2016, 349). Hence, memory ecologies comprise the "multiple forms, flows and iterations" of memory processes (ibid., 353). Hoskins also reminds us that the term "media ecology" particularly refers to "the impact of our interactions with media, with others through media, and also increasingly the dynamic processes that occur between media" (ibid., 354). Based on these conceptualizations, we understand virtual memory ecologies as mediation of historical sites through digital technology with the aim of providing virtual access to a multimodal and multisensual experience of the particular place in relation to the memory of the Holocaust.



Together with the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the Laboratory of Synthetic, Perspective, Emotive and Cognitive Systems (SPECS) in Barcelona has created a virtual 3D reconstruction of the former concentration camp and a mobile augmented reality application that can be accessed through a portable device while exploring the site (Pacheco et al. 2015). Both are based on a comprehensive database that interrelates a variety of documents, including texts, audio, photographs, drawings, interviews, videos, and geolocalized 3D models. Those models were created based on aerial photographs, maps, and drawings. The database “allows for the organization of and interaction with historical content items, as well as the association of these items to coordinates in the real world environment” (Pacheco et al. 2014, 2).

Thus, historical sources, including those that documented and mapped the camp in the state of its liberation, informed the digital applications on two levels: as a basis for the virtual reconstruction and as digital assets that provide additional contextual information for the users. As such, they help structure the virtual experience as “points of content” (POCs), with which the users can engage (Pacheco et al. 2015). Thus, the application “combines exploration of a site’s physical space with a world-scale XR representation of the historical state and learner’s active engagement with curated source material” (Blancas et al. 2021, 148).

The audiovisual installation *Here: Bergen-Belsen, Space of Memory* made the virtual model accessible for visitors at the site in a closed room next to the entrance. Visitors could experience two moments in the former camp’s history: a virtual reconstruction of the concentration camp in September 1944 and the situation in April 1945 when the camp was liberated (Pacheco et al. 2014). Next to the virtual model of the camp, the installation contained additional sources, including photographs and films from the liberation and the distinct voice-over of BBC reporter Richard Dimbleby who reported from Belsen in April 1945. Thus, visible and aural sources informed the virtual creation and are attached to its visualization, which was kept rather abstract so as not to exaggerate an immersive experience. Visitors can also access the virtual structures from a mobile device, which augments the actual physical space of the memorial with an additional layer of visualizing building structures and the topography of the camp. Built-in sensors and GPS locate the device on the site, align the 3D model and the video view, and offer the possibility of navigating towards different points of interest (POIs) and exploring related POCs (figure 15.3). A top bar indicates the position of POCs in the 3D space. Users can access them and even share them with others, for instance, during a presentation after a visit. Drawings from prisoners, liberation photographs, and films thereby offer



Figure 15.3. Augmented reality application in Bergen-Belsen that allows users to overlay the 3D buildings of the former camp on site.

an opportunity to compare and relate past and present by integrating the visual sources into an augmented reality environment. Hence, the sources, which are now geolocalized and thereby able to evoke a visual memory of a past that is not visible and accessible at the historical site anymore, become building blocks of a hybrid reality based on virtual models, technology, an interactive interface, and physical reality, which turns the memorial into a virtual memory ecology (Knoch 2021, 117).

*The Dachau: Die Befreiung/The Liberation*<sup>16</sup> VR and AR experience even makes it possible to superimpose historical liberation imagery on the contemporary physical reality of the memorial site. A mobile tablet application allows visitors to walk through the memorial and explore the history of the liberation in an audiovisual experience. Geolocalized photographs and a voice-over offer glimpses of the camp's conditions during the liberation in the present and provide additional context. Digital technology thereby assists in re-localizing the portable memories that were recorded by American camera teams at those places seventy-five years ago. Similar to a mosaic, those images are re-placed into the modern topography of the memorial,

16 *Die Befreiung/ The Liberation* is a product of Bayerischer Rundfunk for the use on and in collaboration with the memorial site in Dachau.



Figure 15.4. The virtual online tour *Die Befreiung/The Liberation* superimposes historical photographs on the present site and thereby creates a composite of past and present. Source: Archiv KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau/Montage BR, Christopher Roos von Rosen.

thereby creating an oscillating effect of a co-presence of past and present. The web-based version of this application offers a virtual online tour that follows a clearly defined path starting at the entrance of the former camp with the superimposition of a photograph that was taken on April 29, 1945, the day of the liberation. Users can scroll through a text that contextualizes the places and the photographs attached to them (figure 15.4). While scrolling, the historical photographs blend into the pictures of the present site. Simultaneously, the users listen to a voice-over including testimonies from former prisoners, American soldiers, and visitors to the liberated camp.

The virtual tour combines historical storytelling with a proposed walking tour through the camp. All pictures refer to specific places and are interconnected topographically and through the narrative. The storytelling is multimodal in the sense that it combines different visual, textual, and aural elements. Other important sources are testimonies that help to contextualize the historical photographs and places and add a personal dimension to the virtual topographical experience. In doing so, the memorial becomes an interactive projection screen for multimodal engagement with the different temporal layers of the place. With its walkthrough structure, the multimodal storytelling, and the users' interaction by operating the interface—which reveals new visual composites and significant spots of the camp's topography—the Liberation app adopts elements known from the i-doc genre. Broadly defined as “any project that starts with an intention to document the ‘real’ and that uses digital interactive technology to realize this

intention" (Aston and Gaudenzi 2012, 125), i-docs are largely platform agnostic and flexible. They combine digital elements with documentary narration and allow for interaction and even participatory forms of cocreation.

With its innovative strategies in digitizing and curating historical visual records of atrocity sites and the liberation of the concentration camps, the research and innovation project "Visual History of the Holocaust: Rethinking Curation in the Digital Age" (VHH) aims to create interactive pathways through digital collections. It offers access to the visual history of the Holocaust through participation, collaboration, and community building. Creating a multilayered, dynamic, interactive, and participatory experience of space and time leads to multifaceted forms of engaging with the historical material through digital storytelling. Following the broad definition of i-docs, we could also conceptualize the VHH platform's interface, database, and search infrastructure as an interactive approach to documenting Nazi atrocities and the liberation of the concentration camps. As a multidimensional, data and metadata-driven, and query-based infrastructure, the platform allows users to encounter pre-curated and self-curated environments that combine different sources in order to explore the liberation of former atrocity sites. Thereby, films documenting the sites can be related to other documents and media and allow for interaction with the past event through digitized media assets. Users can view and investigate the historical footage with the help of a video player that allows for the manipulation of speed and frame rate. The player also includes a frame-based "film strip" feature that is synchronized with in- and out-frames of shots. It also provides information about shot size and camera movements that result from automated and manual annotation. The time-based annotation also includes the detection of relations between original footage and its later use in other films. A split-screen mode allows users to compare the source and carrier films. The relations annotated in the VHH media management and search infrastructure (MMSI) include direct uses, such as the utilization of liberation footage in Holocaust documentaries, but also indirect references, such as the fictional concentration camp gate in Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island* (2007), which is modeled after the camp gate in Auschwitz best known from Soviet liberation footage.

With the help of these features, users can deconstruct and contextualize the virtual topographies of concentration camps, which documentary and feature films constituted based on the use and appropriation of liberation footage. At the same time, the platform allows users to locate the footage geographically with the help of geolocation references. An important tool for this geographical relocation and contextualization is an in-build map

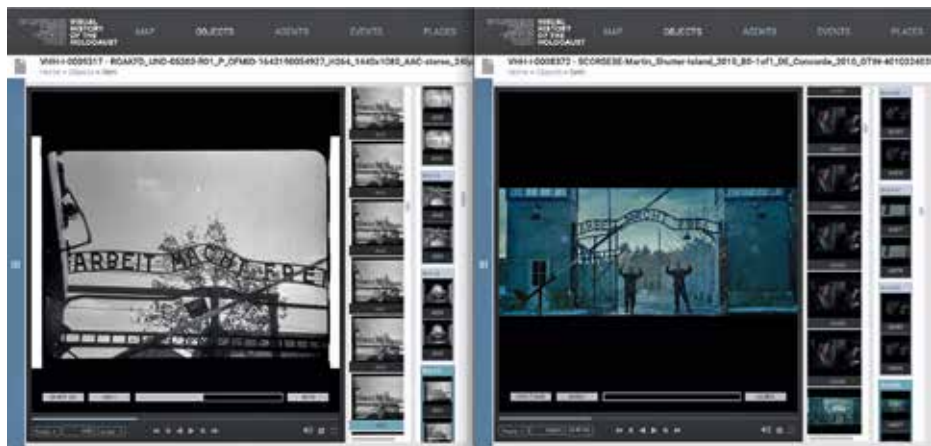


Figure 15.5. Multiple windows in the VHH MMSI document an image migration by displaying the original Soviet liberation footage on the left and its indirect use in *Shutter Island* (2007) on the right.

that interrelates different assets topographically. Furthermore, they can establish new connections to related sources such as dope sheets, interviews, and other historical documents. Turned into digitized, annotated, and interrelated digital objects (Hui 2016), a search infrastructure like the VHH platform can indeed turn the liberation footage into digital building bricks for virtually—though always only fragmentarily—reconstructing the vanished topographies of atrocity sites while also exploring, mapping, and deconstructing the virtual topographies of memory constituted through the use, circulation, and migration of the historical footage. Similar to i-docs, the VHH platform establishes virtual “roads where journeys take place” (Aston and Odorico 2018, 69), providing the infrastructure to navigate factual evidence from Nazi atrocities and the liberation of the concentration camps, which users can then actively explore and interactively engage with through a variety of features. The multimodal character of the VHH platform even intensifies this experience. The different kinds of media assets, which users can explore and interrelate, turn the navigating experience into a multimodal and therefore into a multisensual experience (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2024).

## Conclusion

The footage shot during and after the liberation of German concentration camps by Allied cameramen was of vital importance for the formation of

Holocaust remembrances, and especially for a shared visual memory of the Holocaust. It replaced a void left by the purposeful destruction and loss of perpetrator films at the end of the war, as well as by the destruction and vanishing of the actual crime scenes: the sites of the atrocities. Besides the incriminating, accusing, and shocking effect they had—particularly as part of re-education and atrocity films addressed to the German population as well as to viewers in Allied countries—these images were originally also intended to preserve the facilities and their topography in a moment of total transformation, a potential that soon would unfold. The camp gates, barracks, piles of corpses, bunk beds, piles of possessions, and barbed wire fences represented individual cases but also produced repetitive patterns. The atrocity film *Death Mills* (1946) was a first attempt to make use of these patterns in a typifying way, aiming at making tangible the enormity of the crime not by pointing to individual atrocities but rather by presenting it as a system executed in interchangeable locations. Along with typifying and generalizing the crime went the visual construction of a model concentration camp, a virtualization of the crime scene. While recent research on virtualization and the Holocaust has explored the connection between visualization and virtualization in the context of digitization (Leggewie 2009), the findings presented here suggest that a certain process of virtualizing the camps had started long before the age of digitization and that the opportunities of this process were perhaps anticipated by the cameramen from the Signal Corps and their Soviet colleagues, even if subconsciously. In contrast to current discourses of virtualization, early compilations of liberation footage hint at a process of detaching images from their original contexts in order to form a generalized concept of the camps. This process eventually prepared for the globalization of Holocaust memory and allowed for a transformation of the images of terror into a transportable memory that not only helped to reduce the complexity of the multifaceted crimes of exploitation and mass extermination, but also turned the Holocaust into a manageable and communicable memory.

Today, many of the sites of the genocide, which were demolished or significantly transformed after they had been recorded on film, have been turned into memorials. Virtual reality and 3D models were long deemed inappropriate for commemorating the Holocaust, and memorials, in general, were understood as places of mourning and remembrance rather than places of reconstructing and exploring crime scenes. This has changed insofar as today, films and photographs are also perceived as traces of individual fates, and the act of connecting visual documents and landscapes becomes an act of remembering in itself. Hence, in recent years, the liberation footage has

experienced a second type of virtualization in relation to historical sites that, compared to the typifying virtualization during the first formation of visual Holocaust memory, aims at the opposite effect. By projecting 3D models based on visual sources taken from liberation films and photo collections, a virtual model of the camps is evoked in relation to the current sites as multilayered memory ecologies that allow for the mapping, the exploration, decontextualization, and re-contextualization of the past in the present, while reducing the immersive experience to a minimum.

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## 16. Curating Reconstruction in the Digital Realm

The Online Exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*

Rossella Catanese and Andrea Průchová Hružová

### Abstract

The chapter reflects upon the importance, challenges, and opportunities of a digital presentation of cultural heritage with a specific focus on a representation of audiovisual materials. It provides a complex insight into theoretical, conceptual, and curatorial strategies applied in the multimedia virtual exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*. Thus, it serves as an analytical examination of one unique case study, but it also asks general questions which are relevant and significant for ways we think, act, and curate film heritage in the digital age.

**Keywords:** digital turn, digital memory, transnational perspective, curatorial work, film heritage, multimediality

### Transnational Approach to Digital Memory

The digital turn that we have experienced in the past few decades has gradually, and yet significantly shaped our individual as well as collective social and communication practices. On the one hand, we can think about how much (among many other things) prophetic visions of digital devices being turned into prostheses of our physical bodies have become relevant, or even actualized (McLuhan 2003), or predictions that automatic ways of viewing will replace our performative sensorial experience (Virilio 1994). On the other hand, and for us more importantly, we must acknowledge that the digital turn has also profoundly changed the ways in which we use our mental capacities, including our memory. What, how, and when we remember or forget is nowadays heavily digitally mediated.

Of course, we can think of memory as always dependent on various kinds of media. Let's recall oral mythologies, community narratives, paintings, or fetishized objects, which served as both bearing and shaping forces of memory, or as "technologies of memory" (Sturken 1997, 9). Even though the nineteenth and twentieth centuries made the process of mediatizing memory greater and more visible due to a mechanical reproduction of technical images like photography or film, it is the digitization of cultural heritage that makes the process of mediating memory omnipresent. In our everyday life and through various digital devices and platforms like websites, apps, or online archives, we encounter various sources coming from the past as one rich, multilayered, and multimedia archive. We often even have an opportunity to actively contribute to it. We are asked to upload private family documents or can download materials for personal, educational, or artistic use. Regarding these great changes in our recent memory culture, it is helpful to recall Hoskins's term "connective turn" (2018). The author links it with a massive digitization of physically existing content that started by the new millennium. Hoskins sees it as an

ontological turn in what memory is and what memory does, paradoxically both arresting and unmooring the past. It has re-engineered memory, liberating it from the traditional bounds of the spatial archive, the organization, the institution, and distributed it on a continuous basis via a connectivity between brains, bodies, and personal and public lives. (Ibid., 2)

The ongoing process of digitization, being a part of a larger connective turn, makes memory a global phenomenon. More than ever before, digital memory and its platforms like online archives, exhibitions, or learning centers, open a perspective on understanding history as a transnational one. The still growing level of accessibility of digital historical content reconfigures the modern notion of history, which dates back to the nineteenth century and revolves around the writing of national histories. It hybridizes this traditional conception of history and makes it more relevant for the way we experience our social reality nowadays: as the interconnected one. We are connected through digital media as well as through national borders. As stated by De Cesari and Rigney, the nationally oriented methodological perspective seems to be an obsolete conceptual tool for today's world (De Cesari and Rigney 2016, 2). We should do our best to avoid any kind of "methodological nationalism" to be able to employ two crucial principles of transnational memory studies: multi-scalarity and sensitivity towards

a dialectical movement between the international and the national level (ibid., 5–7).

As will be explained in detail later, a presented case study of the online exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*—which also represents a main public output of the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) international research project “ViCTOR-E: Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration and Reconstruction in Post-WWII Europe”—closely follows both these methodological guidelines. It does not avoid examining smaller local events and putting them in line with larger national happenings, and by that, it applies the principle of multi-scalarity. But foremost, it is interested in finding and highlighting mnemonic forms that had been circulating beyond national borders in non-fiction cinema of the early postwar period, thus capturing the international–national dialectics.

In the same way that digital memory hybridizes the traditional notion of history, it also hybridizes individual historical content. First, it obviously turns historical documents into digital files, but, more profoundly, it puts them into a larger multimedia online environment, where the digital memory can reveal its hypermediated character that accompanies its global nature. When browsing, we interact with historical sources, which come from all around the world, and which openly manifest their digital nature of being virtual files, that is, they are offered to us through a digital interface and we, instead of physically moving from one object to another like in a museum exhibition or archive, are clicking from one graphic element to another. Digital memory communicates through its technical infrastructure, and even though the graphic design does its best to hide the computational operations running behind it, it is impossible to engage with digital mnemonic platforms without experiencing their technical side.

In the realm of digital museology, one can usually encounter the term “virtual exhibition” more often. However, after three years of collaboration with film archives, cinematheques, photographic archives, and private collections, we as curators and researchers started questioning the notion of the “virtual” as related to the exhibition. In fact, despite the digital form of the public outcome provided, we have encountered the materiality of various artifacts, for instance, through the process of digitizing analog prints, when dealing with damages and the need for restoration interventions. Despite the general understanding to the term “virtual” as something false or simulated, according to the French philosopher Pierre Lévy, one of pioneers of the area of digital studies, the virtual represents the mode of existence that lies in the potency, when something virtual can be turned into the real action (Lévy 1995). When online interactions are called “virtual,” however, they enter

our mental framework as not actual. Therefore, we find the term “online” more effective, as it simply means the integration of a software through the internet, that is, the interaction with another software located elsewhere.

However, if we think about what physical archives, exhibitions, or educational centers have in common with their digital variants, it is the presence of an interpretative power of curators and researchers who stand behind them. It is they who select documents for public display, who build connections among them, who decide how certain topics will be narrated and which tools will be employed for communication with the audience. As Crimp (1995) observed in relation to art museums and Bennett (1995) for history museums, exhibitions represent a significant power *dispositif* through which a social order is produced and/or maintained. In this regard, the aim of this chapter is also to transparently articulate a process of curatorial work on the virtual exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*. Eventually, we want to think of our own conceptual and curatorial work as another medium that steps into the process of digital mediation of memory, and therefore we pursue a discussion of the *role of curator as a medium*.

## Film in the Era of Digital Education

Although this is not the place for an in-depth discussion of media literacy issues, we must acknowledge a recent tendency in contemporary theory which has currently focused on the relationship between film heritage and digital humanities and their role in education. (To deepen this topic, with specific reference to the role of non-fiction film in history education and media literacy, see Haváč and Villa, in this volume.)

Films, as an expression of collective memory, have become part of the common cultural heritage of humankind, which deserves to be safeguarded. Since its earliest days, at the end of the nineteenth century, film has developed into a pivotal medium, able to impact on culture on a global scale, and access to this heritage has a certain role in defining historical and cultural knowledge as tools for education. The digitization of film heritage through the acquisition of analog films by digital technologies is parallel to the changes that have occurred in the last years in the shooting, postproduction, and distribution of cinema. The current condition of audiovisual media basically implies a transition, where the analog and photochemical element has been gradually replaced by the digital apparatus, which becomes the standard (Fossati 2018). Despite the fundamental difference between analog and digital formats—namely, the absence of isomorphism in the latter

(Rodowick 2007, 49)—technological hybridization is considered the hallmark of the current media condition, with the coexistence of new and old forms and languages. Some scholars have insisted on a sharp division between the digital apparatus and the photochemical medium, such as Paolo Cherchi Usai, who focuses on the material specificity and historical identity of the film, by raising the issue of cinema's uniqueness, as a cultural experience related to the projection of images from a photochemical support (Cherchi Usai, Francis, Horwath, and Loebenstein 2008, 108). On the other hand, other scholars (such as Tom Gunning and Giovanna Fossati) have welcomed the use of digital technologies, acknowledging them as simply one of the thousands of patents, innovations, and implementations that have occurred throughout the long path of media history (Gunning 2003; Fossati 2018, 21).

Therefore, film and media studies have gradually incorporated both theoretical and practice-based paradigms that make use of computer-based techniques for learning and understanding audiovisual media, challenging the cultural significance of films in terms of medium specificity, while also leading scholars to reflect on new interdisciplinary research methods (Grant 2012).

Digitizing film heritage, the treasures of cinema history can be accessed on an unprecedented scale, since new platforms have emerged to provide and facilitate access, beside a different structural quality and delicacy, for instance, considering that digital copies are not subject to the same damage as analog film elements. On the other hand, the digitization of film heritage implies other challenges related to financial, legal, curatorial, and technological issues.

Besides the different theoretical views on the relation between cinema and digital technology influencing the perspectives on film preservation, too (that is, a certain degree of awareness about issues such as the material difference, the degree of image manipulation, the danger of obsolescence, and the logistical problems of archiving and standardized decoding), there is another layer of the discourse regarding the function that the digitized film heritage has on media and cultural education. The ever-increasing digitization of film heritage allows a more flexible use of easy-to-handle devices to access historical heritage, which can be interpreted both as a tool for knowledge and skills acquisition and is itself an object for study; moreover, such historical heritage has been made available on the web among a large number of resources that were previously less easy to access.

In the last decades, the whole cultural education field, on a global scale, has been investing in the chances of digitally acquiring and offering access to film heritage, as well as to other forms of cultural heritage, as a general

trend to enhance its value, understanding the opportunities of a massive approach through digital means. These international policies have resulted in an extraordinary amount of digitized historical audiovisual sources being available today, which is a major accomplishment. Unfortunately, having reached this goal does not in itself automatically lead to greater understanding or knowledge. On the contrary, this abundance may often risk the opposite effect, that is, the inability to read and distinguish the meanings and features of the sources available by being submerged in a kind of obsolescence. The availability of digitized sources must therefore be accompanied by deep curatorial work, which provides a selection work, a framework-building structure, and guidance towards an in-depth understanding of that heritage. If this is valid for every historical source, for non-fiction film materials there is also another layer related to the indexical qualities of film,<sup>1</sup> which tend to make you believe that they are faithful accounts of the past. Film heritage offers a testimony, a source for the historical knowledge, expanding the variety of historical sources beyond the written ones; being digitized, films are offered on online platforms in large quantities and become increasingly more dispersed and known when archives and other cultural institutions can provide context and guidance to a wide audience, such as through virtual exhibitions.

## Online Exhibitions: New Opportunities and Challenges

The phenomenon of online exhibitions is not a new one, even though it has recently garnered a lot of attention.<sup>2</sup> They are currently acknowledged as

1 Indexicality describes relationships of contiguity in the representation of phenomena and refers to the existential bond between copy and reality. According to Charles Sanders Peirce, an index is a sign that is linked to its object by an actual connection or real relation (irrespectively of interpretation), for instance, by a reaction, so as to compel attention, in a definite place and time. André Bazin defined “mummy complex” as the idea that at the heart of the plastic arts—painting and sculpture—there is a need to immortalize the mortal, to preserve our being beyond its physical existence. The dream is to overcome death. According to Bazin, the reproduction of reality through the camera is imbued with an advantage because, unlike a painting or sculpture, a photograph is not an “ersatz” (a substitute of an inferior quality). Painting, or sculpture, is a replacement for an object, while film and photography are the reproduction, a powerful medium with a technical process of production which allows it to represent an object rather than replace it (Bazin 1967, 9).

2 Debates and research projects revolving around the field of online exhibitions have reached even more prominence in times of global pandemics with the emergence of the need to enable various publics the access to archival, museal, and learning institutions. It has also triggered a public discussion about a possible substitution of interdicted physical spaces for individualized

relevant counterparts to physical exhibitions, able to overcome space, time, and location restrictions, and allowing global visitors to access archival/museum heritage on an around-the-clock basis (Foo 2008). The rise of virtual exhibitions is highly stimulated by constant technological progress in the field of digital visualization, where new modes of computer-driven representations like 3D modeling and augmented or virtual reality have lately emerged. As Sylaiou reminds us, the first articulation of the idea of virtual museum can be assigned to André Malraux, who envisioned a museum as a spaceless institution in 1947 (Sylaiou 2009, 521). The first online exhibitions, however, which took place via the digital platform of the World Wide Web, happened with an ideological shift in the discipline of museology in the 1980s. They became an outcome of a greater turn brought about by the concept of new museology, which required a central revision of both the formal and content-related conservative characteristics of museal institutions. By 1991, professionals interested in the intersection of museum practices and the information and communications technology (ICT) sector were encountering each other through the International Cultural Heritage Informatics Meeting (ICHIM) platform. One of the leading organizations in this field, Museums and the Web (<http://www.museweb.net>), has operated since 1997. Nowadays there are a great number of research projects discussing technological infrastructures, curatorial approaches, or educational strategies of virtual museums and exhibitions as well as those focused on the responses and behaviors of online visitors.

To deliver a complex overview of the latest development in the sphere of online exhibiting is a daunting task, and also not a primary goal of this chapter. Nevertheless, we find it necessary to employ at least some of the existing theoretical concepts to ground and frame our thinking about the virtual exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*. First, we must acknowledge the fragile position of this exhibition that oscillates between the spheres of mass communication and edutainment and the realms of academic research and curatorial practices. On the one hand, there exists a strong request for attractiveness of the content and its graphic interface, which would allure a great number of online visitors. On the other hand, we must constantly reflect critically upon ways of explaining and contextualizing chosen narratives, events, and topics (Carrozzino and Bergamasco, 2010). Second, we see this project as combining and following both paths of the digital curatorship outlined by Pescarin (2014). At once, it constitutes certain notion of *stability*,

digital environments. However, it is important to note that the project of the online exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction* was submitted and designed before the COVID-19 pandemics.



because it provides specific narratives of the past, which are linked together into a larger, internationally driven image-story, as well as employing the principle of *flexibility*, when “we need complex information [to be] divided into small parts or synthesized” (ibid., 132). According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) categorization of virtual educational content, the exhibition presented mostly meets the criteria of the *learning museum* (Schweibenz 2004). It focuses on developing the multiple contexts, rather than on narrating individual objects, meanwhile it also asks users to visit the content repeatedly.

*Frames of Reconstruction* follows the most frequently pursued principles used to structure virtual exhibitions (Sylaiou 2009, 521). The project works with *several contexts*, in which cultural objects are narrated. In this specific case, as elaborated below, these contexts represent horizontally and vertically oriented topics, which help to build a multifaceted understanding to the European post-World War II reconstruction of the public space. It wants to communicate through good *instructional design* in order to make a user experience of the digital environment seamless. It emphasizes the importance of the *content for education*. In this regard, it even contains an international education tool kit that offers interactive tasks for high school students in five languages. These three highlighted principles also correlate with three basic layers that can be distinguished in most virtual exhibitions: technical performance, architectonic infrastructure, and educational value (Daniela 2020). In its spatial arrangement—in contrast to digital libraries or online archives—*Frames of Reconstruction* does not virtually present any existing collection that would be translated into the digital space. It represents a unique, digitally born set of cultural objects, consisting of digitized spatiotemporal artifacts, primarily non-fiction films, which are accompanied by posters, books, or other printed media and excerpts from oral history interviews. To conclude its theoretical description, we can suggest that *Frames of Reconstruction* fully embraces the idea of virtual exhibition as a *multimodal genre* of communication (Siefkes 2016), and in the following part of the text we will pursue revealing its basic formal and content infrastructure.

### Curating the *Frames of Reconstruction* in Detail

Among the main partners of the ViCTOR-E project, the European Film Gateway (EFG) portal played a pivotal role in mediating the collaboration between researchers and key international film archives. EFG represents

the output of a project initiated by the Association des Cinémathèques Européennes (ACE, Association of European Cinematheques) and the Europeana Foundation in the years from 2008 to 2011. The portal had already collected hundreds of thousands of digitized films and film-related documents as preserved in European cinematheques, by facilitating online access to film heritage and to those institutions that hold the original materials. The previous online exhibition built by EFG entitled *EFG2014* focuses on films from the period of the First World War. *EFG2014* provides access to 3,000 titles, including newsreels, documentaries, propaganda and fiction films; this means a huge collection, which is even more valuable if we consider that around 80 percent of silent film production is lost. *EFG2014* therefore offered a very useful model of how to structure the newly built online exhibition due to the similar focus in the grand historical theme, the quantity, and the variety of the sources implied.

The social and cultural role of exhibitions acquired new layers of significance within the digital environments. As priority, there comes the idea of sustainability. As we have decided to design an online exhibition instead of a physical one. This decision was driven by the opportunities of achieving a wide-scale distribution with a minimum environmental impact. It reduced the intensity of processes of transportation and logistics, from carbon footprints to the impact on supply chains, as well as it minimized costs for keeping the variety of media included in the exhibition. Sustainability is typically associated with environmental sensitivity, but also with cost management to avoid waste. Moreover, this choice also implies a broader accessibility, to allow a wide audience the right to knowledge regardless of their geographical distance from the archives, museums, and institutions involved.

In order to design the key functionalities of the virtual exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*, we were required to define a main curatorial approach to this digital project. In this regard, the transnational character of the research conducted and the diversity of four national film corpuses (Czechoslovak, French, German, and Italian) served as leading guides. In result, there were three main decisions reached. First, all media included in the virtual exhibition, that is, films, photographs, oral history interviews, printed objects like textbooks, posters, promotional materials, etc., are not divided into separate categories either based on their national origin, or based on their specific media character. By following this principle, the idea of diversity in terms of multimediality and transnationality was realized, and so the virtual exhibition offers the content of film heritage accompanied by various “plurimedial” items, in reference to Astrid Erll’s

definition of “plurimedial constellations of memory culture” (2012, 231). Second, the virtual show is structured around the principle of hyperlinkage, supporting free and impromptu associations without hierarchical order and cumulative and multilinear ways of organization. In the early years of the internet, the concept of hyperlinkage was based on disrupting existing hierarchies of text in favor of a networked structure of information (Snyder 1996, 75–76), therefore grounded on the idea of association and intertextuality. Such descriptions are quite similar to how philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari described their concept of the rhizome, which defines a nonlinear map with multiple entryways; an acentered, nonhierarchical, and nonsignifying system (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21).<sup>3</sup> The hyperlinkage and its nonlinear learning paths offer opportunities of visualization and critical understanding that are difficult to replicate in physical exhibitions. Third, it is possible to dynamically navigate within the exhibition narratives; specifically, users are able to examine horizontal and vertical narratives. This decision enabled highlighting of the dynamic and transversal character of media memory as well as avoiding the pitfall of reproducing grand historical narratives. The importance of regional historical events and the relevance of the experience of everyday life was acknowledged and treated with the same interest and care as widely known international happenings.<sup>4</sup>

Based on the articulation of these main curatorial visions, a set of key functionalities was designed. Five lines of experiencing the virtual exhibition were conceived. The first one emphasizes the *modality of time*. It provides the audience with a chronologically oriented function of a time line, which helps to get an overview of the most significant historical moments in the reconstruction period. However, the time line also follows the principle of transnationality. That is why it allows learning milestones of individual national postwar trajectories as well as displaying events on a transnational level. The second line highlights the *modality of space*. If it is possible to localize any displayed object geographically, be it a film or photography location, or a witness’s hometown, it finds its specific place on a virtual map. This map can thus be understood as a multimedia platform that can serve as a unique derivation point for entering the virtual exhibition. The third line of navigation is oriented towards the *modality of life*. It allows experiencing events, which populate the transnational and the national time lines, and the places, which are marked on the map, through the

3 For more about a connection of the concept of the rhizome and the Internet, see Lévy 2001.

4 See the introduction of this chapter and the notion of “multiscalarity.”

perspective of witnesses and their specific stories. Thanks to extensive oral history research that was conducted in four countries and resulted in forty-two interviews, the exhibition not only offers information about internationally well-known political and artistic figures, but it also invites viewers to learn about the small histories of ordinary people, whose life had been significantly shaped by the reconstruction era.

The fourth trajectory of the virtual exhibition focuses on the *modality of storytelling*. It is based on twelve carefully curated chapters, which seek to provide a systematic overview of how non-fiction cinema captured the reconstruction period, and namely, how it contributed to shaping it. The chapters are as follows:

- Faces and Places of the Post-WWII Non-fiction Cinema
- Cinema as a Social Agent of the Post-WWII Transformation
- War Crimes Becoming Memories: Grief Guilt and Justice
- Ruins and Rebirth of Arts Heritage
- Materiality & Infrastructure of the Post-WWII Modernity
- Living & Housing in a Peaceful Era
- Maybe (Not) United Nevertheless Connected
- Visions and Attempts to Build a Transnational Europe
- Visible Borders
- Repatriation
- Expulsion
- Escape: Old and New Homelands
- (De)colonization
- Becoming Better through Labor
- Organized Culture: New and Old Traditions and Festivities
- Layers of Education: Schools Museums
- Public Fair
- Spaces of Democracy

Each multimedia chapter consists of film clips, which bear a main story, non-audiovisual objects like photographs, posters, maps, blueprints, or textbooks, whose goal is to use the full potential of examining the history through a great diversity of visual culture and oral history interviews. Almost all chapters include films and objects coming from all four if the countries researched, and their content is fully available in Czech, French, German, Italian, and English. So once again, the transnational approach can be detected here. At first glance, the line of storytelling might appear to have a dominant position within the exhibition complex and therefore, one

could be lured into reading the exhibition as a series of hegemonic or grand historical narratives. In order to avoid this interpretation, the horizontal line of storytelling is balanced by developing the *modality of topicality*. Each chapter contains links to other parts and objects of the exhibition, which allow the audience to reach a research-like experience, when users follow the complex system through individual elements. The most abstract and conceptual understanding of the exhibition is mediated through a set of tags. Almost every object displayed is connected with one or more tags that make it possible to group objects into thematic clusters. The list of twenty-four tags represents a set of higher thematic concepts, which often capture the dialectical dynamics of the ideological, societal, economic, political, and cultural processes of the reconstruction era that cannot be expressed in the form of individual chapters. These tags can mostly be encountered in the form of the opposite terms like “before/after,” “north/south,” “East/West,” “rural/urban,” “elite/masses,” or single tags, producing umbrella notions for individual objects, for instance, “collective participation,” “family values,” or “class struggle.” Through these tags and the network of links, the audience can learn more about the meta-topics that run through chapters and themes like the gender roles, the race, or the ideology.

A dynamic relationship between the lines of topicality and storytelling, however, applies to the whole virtual exhibition. All the modalities mentioned above, which can be understood as layers of one complex, are mutually linked and connected on various levels. Therefore, one film excerpt located within one chapter functions as a trigger activating a non-audiovisual object in another chapter, which can also serve as a mark on the map. Within this rich complex, there exists a multimedia and multilingual education tool kit that uses individual films and non-audiovisual objects from the whole universe of the exhibition.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Frames of Reconstruction Seen through Case Studies***

To explain the curatorial choices behind the virtual exhibition, we would like to propose an analytical perspective through a case study, in order to demonstrate how different layers of the exhibition can set up a dialogue among the diverse criteria and strategies.

Since virtual exhibitions cannot be too extensive and all-inclusive, but must find a compromise with audience engagement and the effectiveness of

5 For more details about the educational toolkit, see Haváč and Villa, in this volume.

the chosen materials, a strict selection was done to reduce the huge amount of metadata work that preceded the building of *Frames of Reconstruction*. This fact resulted in transforming some of the themes into *topical discourses*, which do run throughout the exhibition, for instance, like the theme of gender or race. In terms of the gender issues, when available, curators aimed to balance the selection of films made by female directors, even though they were produced in significantly smaller numbers, and also focused on the representation of women while choosing film clips. A good example is the clip from the film *Heimat ist Arbeit* (Home is work, dir. Bernhard Redetzki, FRG, 1949) from the chapter “Becoming Better through Labor.” The film features four stories of refugees getting back to Germany and looking for a job, but the only story selected is the one told by a woman. At the same time, the exhibition section “Personalities” only refers to two women, as the personalities are present in this section only if they are part of the exhibition content. Therefore this section demonstrates well the great debt of the postwar era to women’s history. In each exhibition chapter, at least one oral history clip has been included with an effort to present memories from an almost balanced number of men and women. Issues about the gender discourses are recurrent in various chapters and through different audio-visual materials. Representations of women are part of the themes that deal with the major issues related to the rebuilding of Europe in the postwar years, including the trauma of war atrocities. Their role is investigated in narratives of the mythology of progress in the infrastructural enhancements, and their presence and importance in everyday postwar life is highlighted. In terms of discourses of race, when discussing the representation of stereotypical roles, the period cultural and societal gaps were considered. The chapter “(De)colonization” deals with the legacy of colonialism and with the wars of independence that emerged immediately after the World War II. Although these took place mostly in Asia and Africa, they have also greatly reshaped European borders. The cinematic portrayal of the remaining colonial gaze, the tendency towards a cultural erasure of differences, and the cultural stereotypes in representing African and Asian countries in European media are central issues of this chapter. An emblematic case represents the West German newsreel *Samba in Rwanda* (Neue Deutsche Wochenschau, no. 1/1950). In the original newsreel, the ironic tone of the commentary and a pointless association of the images with (South American) samba music ridicule the event as an exotic spectacle for European eyes. The curatorial work expressed by the accompanying text aims to testify both to the unchallenged colonial perspectives on African politics in 1950, and to the lack of information

provided nowadays by the archival documentation of the newsreel. In fact, the voice-over locates the scene in Rwanda, and the original summary from the files of the production misplaces the event in Uganda. Thanks to the research done in the Rwanda Cultural Heritage Association, the main personalities involved were identified, with the result of paying tribute to the history documented by this newsreel.

These approaches towards gender and race issues aim to balance the historical plausibility with an effort to highlight the neglected destinies and roles of women and marginalized people. In all the exhibition chapters, the problems related to identity-building and cultural stereotypes are reflected, if possible, through the unique character of the material. To further demonstrate the effort for inclusivity, the inclusive language was used to describe individual subjects, narratives, and themes and is consistently used in all five languages.

The exhibition chapter “Spaces of Democracy” can then serve as an example of curatorial thinking about how to create a coherent, yet diverse and rich building block of the virtual exhibition. In this specific segment, curators tried to condense many key elements to frame postwar political discourses, both in the Eastern and the Western Blocs, and they questioned the issues of civic participation, propaganda, and demonstrations, among others. Here, five objects from thirteen items displayed in this chapter are discussed to provide an insight into the principles of the transnational, multimedia, and multimodal way of digital curation.

To build this chapter, we have started by considering that the end of the war triggered a specific turn in the political discourse. The first object is a photograph from the French Army’s audiovisual archive showing the celebration on May 8, 1945, in front of the iconic monument of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. It stands for values that were addressed to start a huge set of international celebrations by subverting the racism, violence, and cruelty of the Nazi and Fascist regimes. The item is linked according to a parallax structure, which ties together multiple audiovisual contents and visual objects. First, curators provided the object with geotagging references, placing the object in its due context (Paris, Arc de Triomphe) linked into a global map. A second link refers to a time line of the main historical events that happened in the relevant years 1945–56, and therefore the item is connected to the May 1945 event. Third, the conceptually driven tag was added. In this specific case, curators have chosen the effective couples of “freedom and democracy” and “hope and utopia” as some of the symbolic features that characterized the expectations and the perspectives of this time frame.



Figure 16.1. Photograph of *Arc de Triomphe: Fête de la victoire* (1945). Courtesy of ECPAD—Agence d’images de la défense.

Considering participation and the right to vote as the first step for citizens’ engagement, another interesting item shows elections in the context of single-party rules. This is the case for the Czechoslovak film *Volíme šťastnou budoucnost* (We are voting for a happy future, CZ, 1948), which aimed to support a single-party candidate, whereas the way to protest against this candidacy was to cast so-called “white papers” (blank ballots). Curators decided to include four powerful and compelling frames of the film, creating a visually effective collage to stress the propaganda efforts behind this short documentary. The first two images show the election posters (the second with “white papers”) and the second two images follow the rhetorical strategy of showing the contrasts of “what the future would look like” according to the Communist Party (prosperity, work), on the one hand, or according to those who cast “white papers” (strikes), on the other.





Figure 16.2. Collage of stills from *Volíme šťastnou budoucnost* (We are voting for a happy future, CZ, 1948). Courtesy of Národní filmový archiv.

The depicted exhibition chapter also includes one film funded by the Marshall Plan. The ERP established offices to guide the communication campaigns, and their film unit was pivotal, due to the popularity of the medium. The following item is an excerpt from an Italian cartoon, *Uomini e polli* (Men and chicken, IT, 1955), which presents clear anti-communist propaganda, according to the guidelines of the ERP, involving factory workers and trade unions. The main character here is a “chicken,” an Italian idiomatic term to mean a “fool,” one who joins a trade union that recruits workers for the purpose of a Bolshevik revolution, instead of defending the rights of workers. The event-driven link connects this excerpt to the event of the Marshall Plan in the time line and the content-driven link has been made to the chapter entitled “Becoming Better through Labor.”

Despite ERP funding, the American presence in European territories was a controversial subject in Western European countries, which in certain cases opposed US imperialism as a violation of national sovereignty, such as this excerpt from *Les Américains en Amérique!* (Americans in America!, dir. Raymond Vogel, FR, 1950), a film made by Raymond Vogel and commissioned by the French Communist Party. Its aim was to denounce the American influence in France at many levels. The documentary therefore criticizes



Figure 16.3. Still from *Les Américains en Amérique!* (Americans in America!, dir. Raymond Vogel, FR, 1950). Courtesy of Ciné-archives.

the presence of military bases in France as well as the impact of Hollywood cinema, Coca-Cola, comics, etc. The film is marked on the map as Paris. The conceptual tags, which belong to it, are “freedom and democracy,” “consumerism and individualism,” “power and resistance,” and “tradition vs. modernity” (especially for the sequence where the French people keep preferring their wine to Coca-Cola). The content-driven link refers to Robert Ménégoz’s film *Vivent les dockers* (Long live the dockers, FR, 1951) as part of the chapter “Visions and Attempts to Build a Transnational Europe,” and the historical time line is linked through the event of the Blum–Byrnes agreements.

Then there is an excerpt from the oral history section titled “Interview with Giuseppe Matulli about the Constituent Assembly and the Elections.” Giuseppe Matulli, who was the president of the Tuscan Historical Institute for the Resistance and the Contemporary Age, recalls his childhood memories about how the issue of the Constituent Assembly and legacies of Fascism and the Resistance were perceived in the postwar years. The place on the map is recognized as the witness’s hometown Marradi (Florence, Italy). The accompanying conceptual tags “freedom and democracy,” “collective participation,” and “private and public” were chosen. There are also two more links: one connects it to the event of the Italian referendum between



Figure 16.4. Still from the oral history interview with Giuseppe Matulli (2021). Courtesy of Giuseppe Matulli and Istituto Storico Toscano della Resistenza e dell'Età Contemporanea.

the republic and the monarchy, and the other to the item of “Ernesto Rossi’s Tray about the Ventotene Confinement” (held in the Tuscan Historical Institute for the Resistance and the Contemporary Age) in the chapter entitled “Visions and Attempts to Build a Transnational Europe.”

The detailed examination of the inner infrastructure of one of the exhibition chapters shows the crucial criteria applied on the selected sets of audiovisual and visual items: their networking through meaningful ties and references, placing on a map, insertion into a time line of historical events, and contextualization through the system of tags, which allow viewers to organize the exhibition content in relation to other layers of the theoretical interpretation.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have sought to present the virtual exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction* as a case study of the transnational, multimedia, and multi-dimensional way of digital curating. We tried to understand this extensive project in the context of three significant cultural-technological changes that our globalized contemporary society has to deal with: a complex digital turn happening all over the culture, including memory; a transnational approach to memory and its study; and intensive efforts conducted in the field of digitizing film heritage. We believe that all these transformative forces should not be only reflected, but embraced and accommodated, within our

current digital curatorial practices. Their acknowledgment and appropriation, however, should be done with a critical reflection on how global, multimedia, and affect-driven consumer society operates nowadays. That is why our case study rather follows the directions set by the multimedia platform of the virtual exhibition, including its new possibilities and limits, than the directions set by the highly popular sphere of museum entrepreneurship and the never-ending influx of visual spectacle. Therefore, we sincerely hope to provide an example of transparent and self-reflective curatorial work, which carefully uses its power to investigate history and to put it onto digital display.

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## 17. Teaching (with) Postwar Cinema

Fostering Media Education and Transnational Historical Thinking through Non-fiction Film Heritage

*Ondřej Haváč and Paolo Villa*

### Abstract

As an invaluable historical source, non-fiction cinema also represents a precious means for history teaching in schools and universities. By studying history with and through the medium of cinema, students can develop essential skills and knowledge in media understanding, that they can apply also to the current mediasphere. This chapter intends to discuss the challenges of teaching history through non-fiction film, fostering critical thinking and a civic sense of belonging; the availability of (film) sources online, and the need to go beyond the model of mere digitization towards one of full-fledged curatorship. It will introduce, as a case study, the rationale and structure of ViCTOR-E's educational tool kit, and discuss some preliminary tests conducted in Italy and the Czech Republic.

**Keywords:** history teaching, media education, film heritage, historical thinking, digitization

### Introduction: Films in History, Film as History

With his famous intuition, Bolesław Matuszewski has long proved to be right. Writing in 1898, only three years after the Lumière brothers had presented their *cinématographe* in Paris, the Polish photographer called for the preservation of film reels in designated archives, as they would become—to quote the exact title of his brief, forward-looking pamphlet—“a new source for history” (1898). In his “mixture of late-positivist naivety and precautionary insight” (Ortoleva 2004), Matuszewski also advocated for the use of cinema as an educational material in schools.



There is no need to highlight how cinema today is considered an essential source for twentieth-century history and historiography. Enlightening countless aspects of social, political, cultural, economic, and ecological dynamics, it offers scholars invaluable perspectives. Yet historians have long been reluctant to see film as a source for their studies, both for practical reasons (before digitization, consulting films in archives and cinematheques was anything but easy) and for methodological habits, as their training and methodology tended to favor—and partly still do—written documents over other kinds of sources. Images seem to elude the traditional patterns of critical, verbal examination, unless one decides to specialize on them, thus becoming a historian of art, photography, or film, venturing into visual culture analysis. Images also appear to dilute and even obstruct getting to the bigger, abstract picture of historical understanding, as they show one single, specific, and often ordinary detail at a time: a place, an event, a person, a moment in time. And yet, precisely for the opportunity they offer to grasp the deep “texture” of bygone eras with immediacy and visual richness, audiovisual images enormously enrich our comprehension of past decades.

Starting from the 1970s, following into the footsteps of eminent examples (Ferro 1977, 2003; Rosenberg 1988; Sorlin 2013a), a new generation of historians has engaged with films as valuable historical sources; after all, as Hayden White notoriously argued (1988), our understanding of the past is deeply shaped by the images we received *from* the past, and those we reinvent *about* the past.

One must move away from the preconceived idea that only films showing punctual events—the signing of a treaty, the liberation of a city, the protest in a square, a WWI battle—can act as historical documents. Every film is a testimony to its own time, and, despite the flaws it can bear, it always delivers something that no other source can transfer, at least to the same degree of immediacy. Whereas fiction films are less directly associated with the role of historical source, documentaries, newsreels, and amateur films seem to be more easily understandable as such, stemming from a direct contact with reality. It is, of course, a superficial impression, as these films are equally carefully built through layers of rhetorical strategies, ideological aims, economic and political targets, a refined use of the medium: all aspects that need decoding and critical analysis, as for any other, more “traditional” document.

Film’s greatest potential lies in letting us access a deeper level of the past, which unfolds through the images: social behaviors and codes, habits and gestures, the ways of speaking, dressing, and walking, the (often vanished or modified) look of places and objects, the functioning of institutions and

political systems, even entering private lives, thus tracing an uninterrupted chronicle of cultural changes through twentieth-century modernity. Films contribute to illuminating that profound texture constituting the past beneath the surface of major events and figures. Film as a historical source thus aligns with the historiographic vision promoted by the *Annales* school, illuminating the *longue durée* and the “history of mentality” that are, according to Fernand Braudel (1958), the most difficult dimensions to grasp, yet the most relevant to gaining true historical understanding.

Following Pierre Sorlin’s considerations, cinema is a major actor in capturing and creating “the visible” of an age or a decade, that is, what the image-makers decided—consciously or unconsciously—was worthy of representation, and the manners of such representation (2013a, 50). The “visible” is not just highly revealing of what was allowed or not into social discourses; with its continuities, fluctuations, changes, and sudden ruptures it contributed to shaping society and culture. It is therefore a peculiar form of historical source that cannot be overlooked to fully understand history.

True enough, film sources need special requirements at the conceptual, methodological, and logistical level to successfully become agents of learning history, especially in a primary or high school environment. Throughout the three-year project ViCTOR-E (“Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration and Reconstruction in Post-WWII Europe”), focused on postwar non-fiction cinema in Italy, France, Czechoslovakia, the German Federal Republic, and the German Democratic Republic, we devoted special attention on how to use this film heritage for high school teaching. Creating a digital set of activities now available at the project’s virtual exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*<sup>1</sup> has prompted us to reflect on issues of media literacy, public history, and digital access to online historical sources.

Without pretending to exhaust such vast and complex subjects, this chapter aims to share some considerations while presenting the results of this three-year effort. It will first present the challenges and advantages of teaching history through non-fiction film, fostering critical thinking and a European civic sense of community and belonging; it will move on to discuss the availability of (film) sources online, between scarcity and abundance, and the need to go beyond the model of mere digitization towards one of full-fledged curatorship, before introducing the rationale, structure, and some examples of ViCTOR-E’s educational tool kit; lastly, we will discuss some preliminary tests conducted in Italy and the Czech Republic that will lead us to some final remarks.

1 <https://www.frames-reconstruction.eu/>.

## Document(arie)s of History

The use of film for teaching history is nothing new. While the practice of screenings in classrooms has gradually become more and more accessible over the past decades thanks to changes in technology and a simpler, higher availability of film sources (first in VHS, then in DVD and online streaming), discussions and research on the subject have been developed since the 1920s and, after a decline in the second half of twentieth century, have newly flourished in the last thirty years. However, prejudices and false ideas persist among history teachers and educators, as well as school administrators and even students, about the use of film for didactic purposes, while relevant research questions and issues—for instance, the real impact of film in term of cognitive learning in teenagers—remain open and mostly understudied, requiring further study (Paxton and Marcus 2018).

Most often, fiction movies are presented in history classes to help to visualize the past, even though they may have been made decades or even centuries after the events they depict. Without denying the accuracy of historical and costume films, it is not difficult to see how these films tell more of the time when they have been *produced and released* than of the time of their plot. The past acts as a mirror reflecting (on) the present of the film, so—to make just one, crystal-clear example—a 1937 Italian movie on the Roman empire like *Scipione l'Africano* (Scipio Africanus: The defeat of Hannibal, dir. Carmine Gallone, IT, 1937) hinting at the colonial politics in Africa of Mussolini's Italy, could be more rightfully used in a history class on the Fascist regime than on Punic Wars. Documentaries, newsreels, amateur films, almost never imagined at the time of their production to become historical sources for future scholars and students, but more explicitly connected with their surrounding contexts, events, and society than fiction films, represent a precious but underestimated resource.

Facing the challenge of providing history education through non-fiction films, however, poses some considerations and risks that cannot be ignored. Documentary, history, cinema, and memory present numerous permutations in their reciprocal intersections, and they come charged with complex premises about the possible relations between representation and reality (Rabinowitz 1993, 121). The seeming transparency of documentarian images conceals an opacity that needs to be questioned and unpacked. Usually, the specific discursive and receptive mode that documentary films establish leads viewers to believe that what they are watching is reality itself, at the highest possible level of objectivity. Documentaries and newsreels seem to have recorded history *as it was happening*, positioning the viewer

as an in-person yet completely external eyewitness, while in fact every film is the result of a profound mediation of reality, strongly entangled in constructions of meaning that are subjective, individually as well as collectively determined on social, cultural, and political floors. Roland Barthes's considerations still hold true: beneath their apparent indexical adhesion to the real, photographic images hide their cultural sub-meanings. Denotation and technology conceal the image's connotations, and so "naturalize" their cultural overvalues, transferring them to the viewers almost without any acknowledgment from them (Barthes 1964, 131). Documentary cinema, like photography, therefore becomes an extremely interesting object of historical analysis, a tool to develop the students' historical and critical thinking towards mediated representations of reality; but also a multilayered, risky object that needs proper methodologies and approaches to avoid falling into the deceiving belief that it objectively shows reality itself.

It is precisely one of the tasks of media and film literacy to provide students with skills and knowledge acquired *through* media—from the most traditional to the newest ones—but also with abilities and ideas to deconstruct and problematize media themselves, discerning how they influence our relationship with the world. Education *through* media always implies media education, or education *to* media: their role, structure, functioning, and reception must be framed in reference to the historical contexts of production and to our present contexts of use and comprehension. In this specific case, we could refer to "historical film literacy" as "an offshoot of media literacy focused on audiovisual representations of the past, whatever their varying forms" (Paxton and Marcus 2018, 580).

A further, problematic issue concerns is how to reconcile the visual character of these filmic sources with historical comprehension and learning, mostly discursive and verbal; how to harmonize, in a word, two different forms of reasoning, *visual thinking* and *historical thinking*. The former, according to David J. Staley, is synchronous, analogic, synthetic, and nonlinear, while the latter, through the methodology of systemic analysis of the sources, intends to produce a diachronic, logical, analytical, and linear mode of thinking (2014, 29–58).<sup>2</sup> Media literacy can precisely fill in the gap

2 The definition and description of "historical thinking" have been a matter of broad discussion and research for the last twenty years. Two of the most prominent scholars in this field have based their proposals of historical thinking on the capacity of acknowledging a series of "problems" when dealing with historical sources and the comprehension of the past (the problem of *historical significance*, of *evidence*, of *continuity and change*, of *cause and consequence*, of *perspective-taking*, of *ethical dimension*; see Seixas 2009), or on the critical application of some recurring heuristics operations (*sourcing*; *contextualisation*; *corroboration*; see Wineburg

between these two perspectives, as it presents a “dispositional alignment” with historical thinking,

a disposition that promotes meta-disciplinary thinking, a historiographic understanding of historical narratives constituted by, and constitutive of, particular social and political contexts. Reconceptualizing media literacy as a disposition that reinforces historical thinking, demonstrates similarities in these critical processes across media forms and contexts of consumption. (Bellino 2008, 100)

Without losing the features that make historical thinking an essential competence to develop in students (involving critical sense, synthesis skills, capacity to compare and contrast diachronic phenomena, logical progression, abstraction abilities), media education should therefore make them conscious of the specificities of visual communication and representation—valuable skills that they can also use in understanding the contemporary media landscape (Thorpe and Persson 2020). The single film (but also photographs, maps, drawings, or any other visual item) represents only the first step to approaching the past and to reaching a wider, more comprehensive, more complex and general understanding of history in its multiple declinations.

Moreover, the intersection between visual culture and learning history allows us to greatly enrich the comprehension of historical phenomena under new perspectives. Postwar non-fiction films from different nations reveal extraordinary affinities in themes, style, recurring discursive strategies, narratives, and metaphors, thus marking the existence of a common European (cinematographic) culture and of shared social processes of making sense and producing memory out of the dramatic war and postwar experiences—something that has acquired a new and dramatic resonance in the last years, after the breakout of the Russo-Ukrainian War or the migrants’ crisis in the Mediterranean, thus establishing direct connections between past decades and the current situation. History learning as a fundamental asset to understand our time gained an even bigger relevance as the images of war destruction from the 1940s suddenly reappeared in new forms from the Ukrainian front in 2022, urging us to respond with a transnational educational tool that could present a different perspective on European

2001). The two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary, and in fact are close to what has traditionally been called “source critic,” a fundamental staple of history as a discipline and a methodology. For a more in-depth discussion of “historical thinking” as a conceptual category, see Lévesque and Clark 2018.

history than that of division and violence. Postwar films demonstrate not only these connections but also how, under certain aspects, Europe was already strongly interconnected through a common visual culture and wide social dynamics, thus reconfiguring the rhetoric of division and harsh tension usually shaping the historical accounts of the second half of twentieth century. These points of contact deserve to be highlighted as much as those of division, and cinema acts as a powerful tool to accomplish this goal. Media literacy and film education can therefore help us to open new paths toward learning history, to construct civic sense, and to foster a European sense of belonging, favoring a transnational look at our recent past and, consequently, our present.

### **Too Much of Something is Bad Enough**

The number of films easily accessible today is much larger than just a decade ago, thanks to the massive process of digitization and online diffusion that cultural institutions, archives, and cinemathèques have pursued in the last years.

However, facing the request or the will to teach or learn twentieth-century history using non-fiction films available on the web, a professor or a student could claim this to be a difficult task because of the overabundance of resources or, on the contrary, because of their scarcity—in both cases, they would be right. The latter case is due to the evident discrepancy in the coverage of historical events: some were widely filmed, while others were less well documented, if not completely ignored. In truth, the lack or scarcity of film and photographic documentation of certain events or topics is itself a historic issue worth discussing, which could serve as a great starting point for a lesson (why have some things been recorded, and others not?). Here, we would like to focus on the other, slightly counterintuitive face of the coin: the wealth of film sources one can retrieve on the web on broad themes—say, WWI or WWII, or the postwar decade—resulting in a problem for teachers and learners.

In what seems a sort of Copernican revolution, the access, familiarity, and contact with historical sources has been deeply reconfigured by sharing platforms, YouTube, Vimeo, and Dailymotion channels, websites, blogs, and online archives presenting digitized film heritage, producing a real expansion of resources at the users' disposal. On the one hand, this dismantles the traditional idea of the inaccessibility of historical documents, but on the other hand, it adds new aspects to consider, like instability and accuracy.

Instability does not merely concern the collocation of virtual sources in the digital sphere, always susceptible to changes and obsolescence, but also their (re)contextualizations, appropriations, and manipulations, made possible and easy through digital environments and tools, often encouraging grassroots practices that generate reuses and (not so infrequent) misuses of historical documents.

Pseudo-histories, parodic and at times offensive revisitations, postmodern rewritings, up to the full falsification of history: even though these are not at all new phenomena, they have been steadily rising. The abundance of documents and their potentially positive impact on the students' and the public's engagement with history—testified to by the growing attention that public history receives, and the enthusiasm of non-professionals towards the past (Leon 2017; Noiret 2018)—collides with a loss of trust towards the truthfulness of historical sources. A phenomenon that, since the rise of digital media, has affected all audiovisual images, changing the social contract that has regulated our relation to photographic and audio-visual images for almost a century and a half (Fontcuberta 2018, 25). Even though manipulated, analog images guaranteed a satisfying level of objective and trustworthy registration of reality. True enough, images have always been polysemic, unstable, open to rewritings, appropriations, and multiple connotations; but digital conversion, access, and availability have multiplied these possibilities at an unprecedented level.

For history education, criteria of accuracy and trustworthiness of the sources are primarily important. The need to distinguish and select carefully digital sources can lead to privileging certain channels or platforms, managed by recognized educational groups or authorities, like large content aggregators (Europeana, Gallica, the European Film Gateway), or platforms of libraries, museums, film archives. Even in these cases, however, simply transferring the (film) heritage into a digital, online form does not automatically lead to more efficient use for education, and sometimes not even to increased visibility. Herein lies the paradox of massive digitization processes: the more objects are available, the less is clear and simple for inexperienced users to navigate, select, understand, and actively engage with what is at their disposal. "The enormous increase of access to film heritage, which digitization caused, does not imply per se selective knowledge: available sources can be nonetheless neglected" (Pitassio and Villa 2021, 86). Furthermore, this wealth of sources is deeply changing our perspective, as "digital media have transformed the parameters of the past and have ushered in a new imaginary, that amazes in the very recognition of the scale of this post-scarcity culture, but that also [...] makes visible our inability to encompass

everything” (Hoskins 2018, 5). The past becomes unmanageable, and history dangerously fragmentary, chaotic, and incomprehensible.

Although some digital platforms for education present brief descriptions of their objects, what users seem to be more and more claiming is authentic curatorship: the creation of connections and links between the sources, or of educational paths and thematic section presenting films to students with the right methodological and contextualizing tools.<sup>3</sup> The myth of complete digitization, of “having everything on the web,” increasingly reveals its weakness and leaves room for the demand of curating choices and actions. Curatorship becomes essential in light of this “paradoxical scarcity” generated by the overabundance of resources, and the “noise” that this growing, at times overwhelming accumulation can cause. The lack of curatorship also implies the idea of film sources as isolated, self-sufficient cells, while it is exactly in the relations with other sources that lies the key to understanding the historical background that produced them. Archivists, film historians, history educators, pedagogy professionals, educational psychologists, and digital designers should therefore collaborate to offer teachers, students, and schools suitable and fully curated tools that best highlight the didactic potentials of film for history class (as well as for any other subject matter).

### **Teaching (with) Postwar Cinema: ViCTOR-E Educational Tool Kit**

The use of visual sources for history teaching on digital platforms, also in a transnational, fully European perspective, is not something completely new. Among the most interesting and recent examples, we can mention “E-story: Media and History. From Cinema to the Web. Studying, Representing, and Teaching European History in the Digital Era.”<sup>4</sup> Its online platform makes texts, photographs, and some audiovisual sources available for teachers and students, together with samples of lessons and exercises. It also provides tutorial videos about film education, a digital learning environment, and an “Observatory on Media and Europe” that publishes periodical reports

3 On the relevance of curatorship in relation to digitization politics and archival memory, see Brunow 2017 and Wengström 2013.

4 Funded by the European Erasmus Plus program, the project involves institutions from Italy, Spain, Poland, Hungary, the United Kingdom, Slovenia, and the Netherlands. The “E-STORY objective is that of enriching [the] teaching of History mainly at [the] secondary school level through transmitting new didactical methodologies for teachers, teachers’ trainers, researchers and students of History and media that are based on the use of the web and ICTs” (<http://www.e-story.eu/the-project/>).



to examine the ongoing situation concerning “history and television” and “history and the web” in each of the seven countries involved.

Apart from E-story and a few other cases, the presence of films on digital educational platforms is still rather rare. Several reasons can be pointed to, some practical, while others more methodological: certainly, the digital infrastructures that films require to be uploaded and managed, which is significantly more complex than those for still images; issues of copyright and commercial exploitation; the “time factor,” which makes movies a less “agile” source for teachers who have tight schedules, since films “impose” their own time of fruition while other sources (maps, photos, drawings) leave instructors freer to manage the pace of their class; the difficulty of choosing an excerpt out of an entire film. As anyone teaching (with) cinema knows, selecting the right excerpt is fundamental. Neither too short nor too long, it must be highly meaningful both within the original film and for the purposes of the class; it should encourage students to see more, help to introduce and problematize the topic of discussion without oversimplifying it, and should trigger discussions and reflections. This “pedagogy of the excerpt” (Bergala 2002, 24) demands both a full understanding of the selected film and a clear idea of the educational goals one wants to pursue.

Following the Stanford History Education Group model,<sup>5</sup> and thanks to the support of the educational platform Historiana, provided by EuroClio (European Association of History Educators), the ViCTOR-E project created a set of seventeen activities that critically lead high school students (aged fifteen to eighteen) through the postwar decade, presenting excerpts from documentaries, newsreels, and amateur films together with other visual sources like maps or photographs. This teaching tool kit is strongly linked to the virtual exhibition *Frames of Reconstruction*,<sup>6</sup> and should ideally encourage students and teachers to visit the exhibit at length and to retrieve its full movies on the European Film Gateway.

Building such an ensemble of activities encountered several challenges. Conceptually, the goal of producing a *transnational* instrument, which could be used by teachers in France, Italy, Germany, the Czech Republic, and potentially in any other country through its English-language version, forced

5 Founded in 2002 and based at Stanford University (US), the Stanford History Education Group is a research and development group that aims to improve history education by conducting research, working with schools, and providing free materials for teachers and students. Its digital activities, on both American and world history, deal prevalently with texts, paintings, or photographic records, but do not currently include films as historical sources (<https://sheg.stanford.edu/>).

6 <https://www.frames-reconstruction.eu/>. About the curatorship of this online exhibition, see Catanese and Průchová Hřůzová, in this volume.

us to focus on convergence points and common perspectives to overcome the differences in learning programs and guidelines in these countries. How to harmonize divergent approaches, as some events are well-known in a country and not in others, or when they are explained in different terms? In Italy, the referendum that established the country as a republic (June 2, 1946) is a crucial historical date (enough to become a national holiday). However, despite being notable on an international level, it has a predominantly national relevance. One cannot assume that French, German, or Czech students are familiar with this event, nor that their teachers would consider it important enough to focus on it at length during their classes. Similarly, the 1948 communist takeover in Czechoslovakia had a European resonance and would be probably mentioned in a French, Italian, or German history class, but not analyzed in depth. The national perspective, in a word, still dominates high school history programs, despite the efforts made by individual teachers to broaden the spectrum. This clearly complicates the task of reimagining a wider, transnational panorama without losing historical complexity.

In this sense, the already mentioned capacity of film to show the deep texture of historical periods proves beneficial. Instead of precise events or nation-framed narratives, we focused on macro-themes<sup>7</sup> of social, cultural, and political significance, on historical topics linking a variety of films and visual sources from the four countries in a progression of tasks to fulfill. These teaching activities constitute the core of the educational set and highlight the connections, the common paths, but also the differences and contrasts that shaped Europe during those crucial, often overlooked ten years. They are integrated with shorter, “at-the-source” activities, devoted to a single film, whose purpose is to foster knowledge and critical skills towards audiovisual documents. Here the students are asked to reflect on the specific features of the film source: what is a newsreel or an amateur film, which elements should be analyzed (music, shots, voice-over), what was the role of cinema in the postwar period for propaganda, information, or economic purposes. Education through films thus fully becomes film education, introducing students to skills and notions specifically pertaining to film history and film analysis.

To better clarify, let's take just one example: The activity devoted to the postwar refugee crisis and migrations that greatly echoes with current events

7 Here are the twelve macro-themes, based on corresponding sections of the online exhibition: War Crimes and Justice; Ruins and Monuments; The Roads of Reconstruction; The Housing Problem; The Media; Towards a United Europe; Redrawing the Borders; Exiles and Refugees; Men and Women at Work; Schooling and Education; Politics; (De)colonisation.

and debates in Europe. It starts with a short textual introduction and the request to observe and comment on a map showing major flows of people in Europe after WWII. Three films form the backbone of this educational activity: *Kleine Stadt—großes Leben* (Small town—Great events, FRG, 1950), a West German documentary describing the situation on the border between West and East Germany; *Pola, addio!* (Goodbye, Pola!, IT, 1947), a Italian film on the Italian-speaking population of Istria and Dalmatia forced to leave their homes and towns as the regions became part of Yugoslavia; *Archa Noemova* (Noah's Ark, CZ, 1947), a Czechoslovak movie about a ship with Jewish refugees sailing towards Palestine. For each film, students are presented with direct questions, frame analysis, and image comparisons; a conceptual map to discover “click-by-click” sums up the entire activity, which ends with the invitation to reflect and discuss with the classmates and the teacher about the similarities with and differences to today's refugee and migrant crisis. Similarly, all activities are built through progressive steps, presenting several films from at least three different countries. To give students and teachers further elements to understand film language, the relation of cinema with memory and history, or how to plan a history class with films, a series of thematic and downloadable presentations is made available.<sup>8</sup>

Each teacher can choose which parts of these activities to conduct or to skip, and in what order (though the sequence provided is recommended); to assign them as homework or to carry them out in the classroom, together, in small groups, or individually. By registering on Historiana, teachers can furthermore modify the activities according to their needs and desires (and adapt them to younger pupils), send them to the students, receive answers via email and send back their corrections and comments. Though moderately flexible, the founding structure is rather stable for all activities: a short explanation introduces each task (a longer introduction opens the activity, giving some preliminary historic information); students complete the assignments; lastly, an invitation to discussion closes the activity. This three-step, vaguely Montessorian scheme is based on the “Situating Learning Episode” methodology (Rivoltella 2013; 2016) and proves particularly successful when teaching with media. Instead of giving students

8 For the students: “Components of a Movie,” “What Is Non-fiction Cinema?,” “What Is Cultural Memory?,” and “What Is Oral History?” For the teachers: “Cinema and History,” “History Teaching and Media Literacy,” “Online Film Archives for History Teaching,” “Teaching with Film, Lesson Sample #1: The Italian Referendum of June 2, 1946,” and “Teaching with Film, Lesson Sample #2: The Train as Symbol of Progress in the Postwar Reconstruction.”

a comprehensive, frontal explanation first and then assigning tasks and exercises, this method overturns the standard procedure; after a very quick introduction, learning is based on experience—in this case, watching a film and trying to figure out some of its aspects. The last yet essential step is a recap between students and instructor, when the latter makes sure the topics have been correctly conveyed, goes deeper into explanations, and clarifies any possible misunderstanding. Ideas and impressions that the students formulate while watching the films are often shaped by preconceived bias, references to current events, or incorrect notions. As with any other historic source, it is the educator's task to lead a critical analysis and foster a correct understanding combining both the historical perspective and references to contemporaneity.

### **In the Classroom: Testing the Tool Kit in Udine and Brno**

Designing an educational instrument needs moments of confrontation with those who eventually will use and benefit from it, that is, students and teachers. Some preliminary presentations were first conducted in Italy, with history teachers in October 2020, and with high school students in January and February 2021. Even in the early stages of the design process, these workshops gave us ideas and material to reflect.<sup>9</sup> Through four different workshops on postwar topics presented with documentaries and newsreels, we gathered the students' points of view. All of them (sixteen to nineteen years old) showed a clear interest in using films as a history source.

Final and more in-depth testing was conducted in early 2022 in the Czech Republic, once the tool kit had reached a definitive design and a final shape.

History as a subject is taught in almost all kinds of high schools, except some vocational schools, as an integral part of secondary education in the Czech Republic. It is part of curriculum framework<sup>10</sup> as a field of stud-

9 It is also worth mentioning an online workshop held halfway through the design process with MA students in media education and learning psychology at the University of Cagliari, May 2021; a presentation to MA students in film and media studies at Università Cattolica in Milan, July 2021; ongoing engagements with MA students in media education from the University of Udine; a presentation at the annual Euroclio Conference in Ferrara, April 30, 2022; an online seminar with high school teachers, held in collaboration with the European University Institute of Florence, June 21, 2022. On all these occasions, questions and comments gave us meaningful insights into how to improve the tool kit.

10 The new curriculum framework (Rámcový Vzdělávací Program [RVP, Framework Educational Program]) is a set of standards of learning outcomes which students from three to nineteen

ies called “Humanity and Society” and its aim is to present the history of humankind from the prehistoric period to contemporary history. In recent years there has been a strong tendency to focus on modern history, especially national and international events and phenomena in the twentieth century. The trend has encouraged a range of new associations, websites, and online applications that present digitized archival sources such as photos, posters, maps, or documents.<sup>11</sup> New schoolbooks and workbooks presenting previously neglected historical topics such as the expulsion of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia have been published.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the abundance of newly published materials focused on the twentieth century, there is one type of a source which is barely presented. It is a non-fiction film, which needs (as stated above in this chapter) different approaches from teachers, who are often unable to devote enough time to explain the specificities of non-fiction film during time-limited lessons.<sup>13</sup> There are some exceptions worth mentioning, one of which is the educational project JSNS,<sup>14</sup> bringing important topics through films and learning activities into schools. It focuses on human rights, modern Czechoslovak history, media education, and other topics. *Famous Days*, a program of the online television channel Stream.cz, has been running since 2010 and enjoys wide popularity among students as well as among history teachers. The Association of Teachers of Civics and Social Studies participated in the development of its website.<sup>15</sup> In the same year, a special website containing methodological materials for teachers and worksheets for students was also launched. It presents famous stories about historical figures and crucial events in Czech as well as world history.

The testing of the ViCTOR-E tool kit took place at the Mojžírovo náměstí grammar school in Brno in two history lessons, each one lasting forty-five

years of age should know. The framework was approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic in 2004 (<http://www.nuov.cz/ramcove-vzdelavaci-programy>).

11 For instance: Paměť národa (<https://www.pametnaroda.cz/>) or HistoryLab (<https://historylab.cz/>).

12 One of them is DIDAKTIS publishing, which focuses on developing students' historical literacy. More on the website of the publishing house (<https://www.didaktis.cz/>). The expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia used to be highly politicized topic, which was influenced by ideology of Marxism–Leninism before the Velvet Revolution. The discourse has been gradually changing since the 2000s.

13 One lesson takes forty-five minutes in the Czech school system.

14 JSNS is an abbreviation of the educational program called Jeden svět na školách (One World in Schools), which is one of the activities of International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival One World, organized in Prague. See more: <https://www.jsns.cz/>.

15 More information can be found on the website: <https://www.slavne-dny.cz/>.

minutes. There were twenty-three students (aged sixteen to seventeen) in the second year of their studies, and who were supposed to have elementary knowledge of Czech and of world history of the twentieth century. The lesson was divided into four parts: a) an introduction to the application and its possible use; b) a brief explanation of postwar history and of the international context with open questions; c) watching a clip about a certain issue and working out the tasks set in the corresponding activity; d) final feedback at the end of the lesson. The aim of the lesson was to present transnational topics through visual materials and to show students that many issues of the postwar period were the same in various European countries.

At the beginning of the first lesson, while introducing the project, it was found out that the students were curious and willing to test the application even though there was no text in Czech (as it was a beta version of the application) and all the descriptions were available only in English. Thanks to the teacher translating the introductory text and the attractive visual outlook of the postwar issues presented, their interest did not decrease. After the introduction, a photo of destroyed Berlin taken at the Brandenburg Gate was shown on an interactive board and the teacher began asking open questions related to WWII and the mass destruction of European cities. The students were motivated; however, their knowledge of the history and of the international context was not sufficient, so this second part took more time than expected. For this first lesson, the topic “Ruins and Monuments” was chosen, as it depicts the cultural and material destruction well and helps students to understand the harsh situation that European nations were facing at the end of the war. The students were asked to complete the first two tasks and watch the Italian film *I monumenti italiani e la guerra* (Italian monuments and the war, dir. Giampiero Pucci, IT, 1946–48) about the reconstruction of historical sites and monuments that were crucial for the newly rebuilt national identity. There were five minutes to conclude the topic, and the students gave feedback about the application and postwar destruction and reconstruction. Their reaction was positive. Most of them enjoyed working with Historiana and, according to their answers, it was clear that they were able to understand the key theme of the non-fiction film—the value of historical sites for national identity and the reasons for their reconstruction.

The “Exiles and Refugees” topic was at the center of the second lesson, a week later, with a slightly different structure. It started with a revision of the postwar geopolitical situation, continued with the activities on Historiana, and concluded with showing photos of the refugee crisis nowadays for comparison. There was more time to deal with the tasks presented on the website and with the clips. The first one was a 1950 West German film showing the

situation in the town of Helmstedt, on the border between West and East Germany. The second, *Pola, Addio!*, told the story of the exodus of the Italian population from Istria and Dalmatia. The teacher had a chance to explain the motifs and the background of the clips and the reasons why they were filmed in that way. It became clear to students (especially from the German clip) that non-fiction films did not depict reality *as it really was*, that their production depended more on politics, ideology, and economic strategies.

The last part of the lesson attracted the attention of most students. A couple of photos of the recent refugee crisis<sup>16</sup> taken at the Polish–Belarus border were shown on the whiteboard. Students were challenged to compare the pictures to the clips they had seen before. They were able to point out the similarities of the refugees’ situation in the late 1940s to that of the people fleeing today, not only in the conditions they were in but as well in terms of their depiction in the news and in the documentary clips. At the end, the students were asked to analyze the lesson and the topics, and these were their reactions:

“I remember more from this kind of lesson than from the normal one.”

“I like the visual materials and the videos. I have a better idea how it looked in Europe back then.”

“I really appreciate the short text and short instructions.”

“I like that the topic was ‘up to date’ and showed the problem in other European countries, too.”

Similar answers had been given by Italian students in Udine. What most impressed them was the images’ strength and clarity to (re)present the past, to establish a direct contact with personalities or events, ultimately with history itself, removing—in their view—the need for any mediating tool, especially the textbook. As one student put it:

“With images, I understand things better, much better than with a book.”

Clearly, the risk is somehow to suggest or reinforce the widespread idea of the documentary’s natural “transparency”: since I see it in a film, it must have happened *exactly* this way. It is true that films seem to renew the past, calling it back to life, and this is often the reason for their fascinating power. But there is no such thing as a “transparent” image. The need for

16 The lesson had taken place on February 23, 2022, just one day before the war in Ukraine started.

“moderators” like textbooks, contextualizing digital environments, and in particular teachers is therefore even more essential, in order not to mistake for historical “truth” what is simply a partial, culturally and ideologically charged perspective. Films call for deep, deconstructing critical interpretation, however counterintuitive and difficult this process for such a “clear” historic source might appear at first sight to students and those unfamiliar with historical methodology (Martin and Wineburg 2008, 305–6).

The testing in Udine and in Brno have verified the potentiality of film and visual materials for the educational purposes. The activities created were easily accessible, understandable, and made students experience various aspects of the postwar history in a transnational way. The strong visuality and topicality of the themes attracted the students’ attention and made them rethink some of the stereotypical national views, while understanding non-fiction films as historical sources carrying a determined perspective that needed deconstruction and analysis.

One must also keep in mind that cinema is just one of the potential sources to teach history, and that not every aspect of the past can be grasped, understood, and rightly contextualized through film: “audiovisual products are not able to explain a matter, like the origins of a conflict or the evolution of a crisis” (Sorlin 2103b, 23). Films always give partial visions of the event, singular perspectives that must be integrated in a broader horizon to understand the bigger picture. For this reason, and as a conclusion, we would like to stress that the role of teachers is irreplaceable, as they are the primary, fundamental intermediary between the students, the films, the digital activities, and the possibility of a complete, clear historical understanding and consciousness. The digital set of activities is not conceived as autonomous from the teacher; on the contrary, it is pointless without the guidance of the in-person educator, the most precious of all sources.

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# List of Acronyms

ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Central State Archive) (Italy)
AFIS	Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia (Trust Territory of Somaliland under Italian Administration)
AID	Land- und hauswirtschaftlicher Auswertungs- und Informationsdienst (Agricultural and Domestic Evaluation and Counseling Service)
BDFEA	Bund Deutscher Film-Amateure (Association of German Film Amateurs)
BOS	Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy (Bureau for the Reconstruc- tion of the Capital) (Poland)
CFU	Colonial Film Unit (UK)
CPCF	Comité de Propagande Colonial par le Film (Colonial Film Committee) (France)
DEFA	Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (German Film Corporation)
ECA	Economic Cooperation Act, which then became the Economic Cooperation Administration
EFG	European Film Gateway
ERP	European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan)
FBW	Filmbewertungsstelle der Länder der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Film Rating Board of the States of the Federal Republic of Germany)
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FSK	Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft (Self- Regulatory Body of the Movie Industry)
FWU	Institut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unter- richt (Institute for Film and Image in Science and Education)
GDR	German Democratic Republic
ICD	Information Control Division (US)
ICR	Istituto Centrale per il Restauro (Central Institute for Restoration) (Italy)
ICT	information and communications technology
Incom	Industria Cortometraggi Milano
Luce	L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa (The Educa- tional Film Union)
MMSI	media management and search infrastructure

MP	Marshall Plan (European Recovery Program)
MRU	Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme (Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Development)
MSA	Mutual Security Agency
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC)
NDW	Neue Deutsche Wochenschau (New German Newsreel)
NWDR	Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (Northwest German Broadcasting)
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
OMGUS	Office of Military Government, United States
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)
POC	point of content
POW	prisoner of war
QT8	Quartiere Triennale 8 (a district in Milan, Italy)
RKW	Rationalisierungskuratoriums der Deutschen Wirtschaft (Rationalization Board of the German Economy).
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SMAD	Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (Soviet Military Administration in Germany).
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
UFA	Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft (Germany)
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
UPC	Union des Populations du Cameroun (Union of the Peoples of Cameroun)
USIS	United States Information Service
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VEB	Volkseigener Betrieb (publicly owned enterprise) (Germany)
VHH	"Visual History of the Holocaust: Rethinking Curation in the Digital Age" project
ViCTOR-E	Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration and Recon- struction in Post-WWII Europe
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

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# FILM CULTURE

IN TRANSITION

After WWII, cinema was everywhere: in movie theatres, public squares, factories, schools, trial courts, trains, museums, and political meetings. Seen today, documentaries and newsreels, as well as the amateur production, show the kaleidoscopic portrait of a changing Europe. How did these cinematic images contribute to shaping the new societies emerging from the ashes of war, both in the Western and in the Eastern bloc? Why were they so crucial in framing and regulating new places and practices, political systems, economic dynamics, educational frameworks, and memory communities? This edited volume explores the multiple ways nonfiction cinema reconfigured public spaces, collective participation, democratisation, and governmentality between 1944 and 1956. Looking back at it through a transnational perspective and the critical category of spatiality, nonfiction cinema appears in a new light: simultaneously as a specifically situated and as a highly mobile medium, it was a fundamental agent in reshaping Europe's shared identity and culture in a defining decade.

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