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Autoethnography and Postmemory: A Methodology for the Use of Film Forms as Research

Romana Turina

Abstract: *Practice as Research (PaR), and Practice-led Research, as studied by Hazel Smith, Roger T. Dean, and Graeme Sullivan, are increasingly being implemented in a wide range of disciplines. In this article, I will report on the methodological trajectory of my creative practice, an autoethnographic work that used film forms as research. The process progressed on three levels of investigation: the narrative, the epistemological, and the ontological. It developed from my personal experience and research in the archive, as a network of references supporting and responding to the needs of producing films through the exploration of prior film methodologies, and elaborating novel forms of mediation of history, memory, and postmemory.*

Introduction

My recent research through creative practice focused on a case of silenced history and investigated its possible mediation in the film form. The case study regarded Trieste, and the northeastern part of present-day Italy. Trieste was a multiethnic Austrian port from 1382 to 1918, before being annexed by Italy after the end of the First World War. In the city, cultural and social affiliations varied but often coagulated around the three major ethnic groups: Austrian, Italian, and Slovenian. However, as Alexandra Kersevan and Michael Ebner analyse, between 1918 and 1943 the Fascist regime forcefully Italianised, exiled or imprisoned the indigenous Slav population of the area (Ebner 189–191, 260–261). Documentation of the events that affected half a million Slavs is held in several European archives, among others in the United Nations Archives; however, the devastating impact of these events continues to be unrecognised in Italy. The cumulative effect of the array of policies that backed up the Italian anti-Slavism from the 1920s and until the 1950s—including the years between 1943 and 1945, when the city was annexed to the Greater Germany, and the decade at the end of the Second World War, when an Anglo-American government managed Trieste—created a social, political and cultural rift. Since 1954, when Italy regained the city, and until the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, the forced Italianisation of the indigenous Slav population of Trieste remained largely unacknowledged, as Trieste found itself on the Iron Curtain dividing capitalist and communist Europe.

In order to understand how I could translate the silenced act of colonisation that the Reign of Italy initiated in 1918, I first investigated the cultural and political trajectories that have come to characterise Trieste's identity. The choice of film as the principal focus of my critical interrogation of the means of expression chosen by political forces in power in specific decades of Italian history and, simultaneously, as the arena of my creative research, was guided by the understanding that cinema has been constitutive of shared memory, and a source of images that populate both the external world and the minds of the general public. As Deleuze

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stated in the inteview "The Brain Is the Screen", I believe that "cinema not only puts movement in the image, it also puts movement in the mind", as the "relations of time are never seen in ordinary perception, but they are seen in the image, as long as it is a creative one. The image renders time relations" (Deleuze 366, 371). This research constituted the groundwork for an "artistic research", consisting in the writing of screenplays and the making of films (Bell 47). To contextualise the artistic practice, and formalise the research questions, I formulated my hypothesis on the idea that the moving image had a pivotal relevance in the determination of Trieste's identity and history, therefore contributing to silencing the mediation of specific unsavoury events. Consequently, I planned a procedure to aquire data capable of confirming or questioning my proposition. I studied Italian films, early cinema newsreels, and relevant TV broadcasts produced between 1908 and 2010, in and about Trieste. This period was chosen because in 1908, as Elio Apih established in *Trieste – Storia di una città Italiana*, Trieste witnessed the first organised attacks against indigenous Slavs by a group advocating its annexation to Italy, the *Sursum Corda* (92). In 2010, the Italian, Slovenian and Croation presidents met in Trieste, and offered a communal message of good will for the future of the region during the Concert of Friendship, 13 July 2010.

No different to any ethnographer, where the insider's perspective is integral to the understanding of what is studied (Haseman 100), when analysing moving images depicting Trieste I filtered their content through my understanding of Trieste's identity, as a person born and raised in the city, and juxtaposed my findings with the Italian identity of Trieste, as envisioned and projected from the central government in Rome. This research informed the development of characters, and stories I wanted to tell in film. Simultaneously, the creative practice generated questions that I addressed with additional archival research, drawing upon archival material accessed from diverse sources. In London, I accessed the archives of the Wiener Library and the United Nations Archives. In Italy, I accessed the holding of the Archivio Storico Istituto Luce (Luce Archives), the Cineteca del Friuli, and the Narodna in Študijska Knjižnica (The Slovene National and Study Library). In Ljubljana, I accessed the Slovenska Kinoteka (Slovene Film Archives), the Slovenski Etnografski Muzej (Slovene Ethnographic Museum) and the Narodni Muzej Slovenije (Slovenian National Museum). Important material was found in the archives of *The Guardian*, UK; and the *Betfor Association* (British Element Triest Force), UK. Additional information was obtained from the British Pathé film Archive, UK; The Marshall Plan Film Archive and the CIA records in the US National Archives.

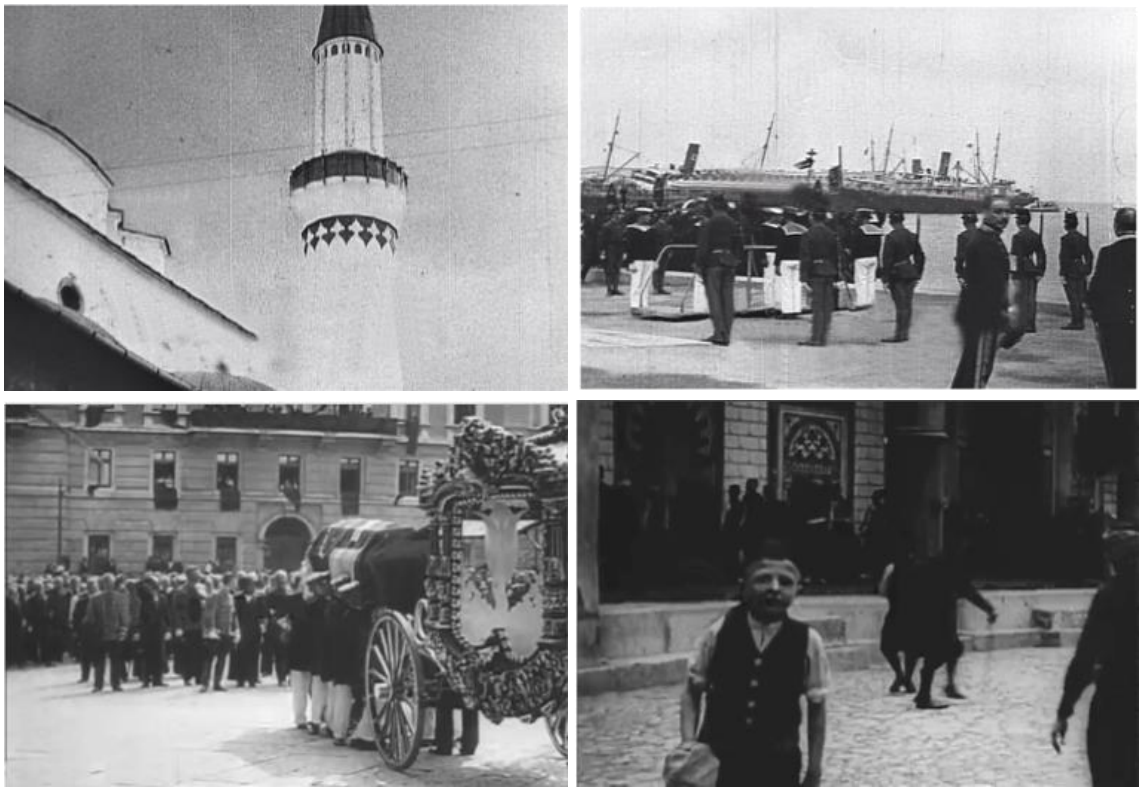
In retrospect, my work routine adhered to the process proposed by Henk Borgdoff, as the research took place in and through the creation of art (147). The outcomes were first screenplays, intended as "finished creative works regardless of their production contexts", and then short films, accompanied by an exegesis (Batty and Baker 68).

The Projected Identity of Trieste

From a very early point, cinema played a key role in the promotion of Italian nationalism. Initially, in Italy the principal sources of feature film scripts came from pre-existing literary texts, as in the first blockbusters *Quo Vadis* (Enrico Guazzoni, 1913) and *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914). The impact of these films on the Triestiners is difficult to imagine. Before Trieste was annexed by Italy, the population spoke seventeen languages (Tobin 149–150). The social hierarchy, however, promoted identification with Italian culture and created tensions between the Italian and Slav element, as documented by Cathie

Carmichael (11) and Elio Apih (*Italia* 15). Pavel Stranj, Vladimir Klemenčič, and Ksenija Majovski in *Slovensko prebivalstvo Furlanije-Julijske krajine v družbeni in zgodovinski perspektivi* [*Slovenian population of Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the socio-historical perspective*] demonstrated that by 1911, 25% of the population of the municipality of Trieste spoke Slovenian and identified with the Slovenian culture. The cultural clash between the emergining Slovenian and the established Italian and Austrian middle class was strong and the "demonisation of the word *Slav* served as a negative against which to measure positive German and Italian cultural characteristics" (Wolff 312; emphasis in the original).

Within this milieu of cultural confrontation, one of the most significant cinematic depictions of Trieste is the newsreel that reported the arrival of the remains of Franz Ferdinand, Royal Prince of Hungary and Bohemia, and his wife Sophie, the Duchess of Hohenberg (1 July 1914). Assassinated in Sarajevo (28 June 1914), the royal bodies travelled back to Trieste on the battleship *Viribus Unitis*, built in Trieste, before being transported by train to Vienna. The French company Pathé Frères sent cameramen to Trieste from its foreign office in Vienna and filmed the reaction of the public to the event under the title of *Die Einholung der Leichname Sr. k.u.k. Hoheit des Erzherzog–Thronfolger und Gemahlin* [*The Collection of the Royal Body of the Archduke and Successor to the Throne and Spouse*]. Trieste's identity is addressed directly in the newsreel: from the sequences showing Sarajevo the film cuts to Miramar Castle in Trieste, and to a city where everything evokes the idea of a whole empire in mourning.



Figures 1–4: *Die Einholung der Leichname Sr. k.u.k. Hoheit des Erzherzog – Thronfolger und Gemahlin* (Pathé Frères, 1914). Screenshots with link to CriticalPast video.

In stark contrast, only one year later Trieste was being presented as *Italianissima* (intrinsically Italian) in Emilio Ghione's feature film, *Guglielmo Oberdan, il martire di Trieste* [*William Oberdan, Martyr from Trieste*] (1915). *Guglielmo Oberdan* represents the first

significant cinematic example of how the Italian nationalist movement sought to mediate the historical representation of Trieste. Produced entirely in Rome by Tiber Film (Cardillo 212), it advocates a centralised cultural idealism and the ineluctability of Trieste's annexation to Italy. The film focuses on Guglielmo Oberdan, a member of the Italian irredentist movement who deserted the Austrian army and plotted to assassinate Emperor Franz Joseph in 1882. Oberdan is portrayed as an Italian hero who tries to kill a tyrant, despite the fact that he was baptised as Viljem Oberdank and his mother was a Slovenian (Pahor 7). The life and beliefs of Oberdan stand in for the entire population of Trieste and act like a metonymic device through which Ghione reduces Trieste to a longing Italian mass.

Guglielmo Oberdan belongs to a set of films that contributed to the determination of a sense of destiny and identity in the Italian elite of Trieste, who supported the political agenda of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944). Initially, the desire to see Trieste annexed to Italy determined the political orientation of the Italian Futurism (Goriely 153). In 1909 the *Manifesto Futurista* appeared first in Trieste's newspaper, *Il Piccolo della Sera* (10 February 1909), and later in the French *Le Figarò* (20 February 1909). More than an aesthetic movement, in Trieste the Futurists organised politically. Benito Mussolini and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti held their first joint meeting in 1915 (Jensen 37). Subsequently, the *Fasci politici futuristi* were absorbed into Mussolini's *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (1919), later Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party). In 1921, in Trieste there were 14,756 members of the Fascist Party, representing more than 18% of the overall membership of the movement (Bosworth 153–159). Consequently, as demonstrated by Annamaria Vinci and by David Forgacs, when Mussolini gained political power in Italy in 1922 Fascism had already triumphed in Trieste (Vinci 100).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Italian feature films, documentaries and newsreels of the Fascist period served to reinforce the image of Trieste as an ethnically and culturally homogenous city. As Lando Ferretti, the Minister of Press and Propaganda, pointed out: "documentary film provided the ideal venue for writing a new national *storia* (story), or history" (Lasansky 99). Actualities and documentary images "constantly referred to a meta-community that could be authenticated only on film" (Hay 207), as the medium validated the existence of a national spirit through the creation of popular myths. Accordingly, between 1922 and 1945 Trieste appears in the Italian newsreels when the Italianity of the city is celebrated. Examples include the newsreels *Turati visita la milizia triestina. La rivista delle Organizzazioni Giovanili Marinare* [*Turati visits the Triestine Militia. The Review of the Maritime Youth Organizations*] (Giornale Luce, 1929), *Un grande teatro romano* [*A Large Roman Theatre*] (Giornale Luce, 1938), and *Campionati di nuoto e di pallanuoto nelle piscine del Bagno Ausonia* [*Swimming and Water Polo Championship at the Ausonia Beach Resort*] (Giornale Luce, 1939). Collectively, these newsreels demonstrate how the image of Trieste was constructed in line with the promotion of Italian nationalism. The shift in the understanding of Trieste's historical past, from cultural diversity to homogeneity, was welcome by the Italian elite, which had influenced the urban policies and kept the Slav indigenous population firmly settled on the outskirts of the city (Kalc 60). As a result, by 1927 one third of the entire Slovenian population in esistance had vanished from public view.

Simultaneously, Italian cinema filled life with images of the regime's own version of film culture, as established by Victoria de Grazia in *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (1981) and by Cesare Pavese in *The Burning Brand: Diaries, 1935–1950* (1961). In *Il grido dell'aquila* [*The Cry of the Eagle*] (Mario Volpe, 1923), Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882) becomes the alter ego of Mussolini, who has finally completed the unification of Italy. In *1860–I Mille di Garibaldi* (*Gesuzza the Garibaldian Wife*, Alessandro

Blasetti, 1934), Garibaldi's expedition becomes the historical precedent to the March on Rome, the Fascist coup d'état led by Mussolini in 1922. Very few feature film productions were made in Trieste during the 1920s. They included *Il biricchino di Trieste* [*The Teaser from Trieste*] (Alberto Traversa, 1920), *Deus Judicat* [*God Judge*] (Retti Marsani, 1920), and *Die Dame und Ihr Chauffeur* [*The Lady and her Chauffeur*] (Manfred Noa, 1928)—unfortunately, these films are now lost. Productions resumed in the 1930s under the influence of Verismo, which constituted the springboard for the celebration of fascist normality (Carsten 62). In *Camicia nera* (*Black Shirt*, Giovacchino Forzano, 1933) the rhetoric of national heroism is expressed by rapid montages of factual images of the Italo-Austrian front between 1914–1918. Location after location, the audience encounters Trieste with the call: "*Ragazzi, ci si rivede o a Trieste, o in Paradiso!*" ["Boys, we'll meet again in Trieste, or in Paradise!"]. The entrance of the Italian troops in Trieste (November 1918) is followed by images of Miramar Castle, and the new roads built by Mussolini. *Uomini sul fondo* (*S.O.S. Submarine*, Francesco De Robertis, 1941) and *Alfa Tau!* (Francesco De Robertis, 1942), both filmed in Trieste, are precursors of the Italian Neorealism movement (Ventura 32). In *Uomini sul fondo*, De Robertis merges drama and documentary style in an exploration of the events following the collision of an Italian A–103 submarine with a surface vessel. In *Alfa Tau!*, he attempts to deviate from the fascist discourse and in the opening titles declares to have implemented a historical verismo where "the humble seaman who is the protagonist has really lived the episode that now he re-lives in the film". However, *Alfa Tau!* retains the fascist rhetoric of proclaimed sacrifice for the fatherland, and identification with a racial specification (Ventura 32).



Figure 5: *Taking of Trieste* (British Pathé, 1945). Screenshot with link to British Pathé video.

In the decades after the Second World War, the consolidation of Cold War narratives came to dominate the mediation of Trieste's history in Italian cinema. From 1945 to 1954, when Trieste was reunited with Italy, the Anglophone newsreels came to play a major role in shaping the narrative discourse of Trieste's political climate. Managed by the Allied Military Government (AMGOT and later AGM), the city witnessed different phases of political and cultural intervention. In the process, the moving image added to the creation of a set of manifest assumptions on the reality of warfare in the region. In 1945, however, we find images that tell another story. The British newsreel presenting the arrival of the Allied British troops in Trieste (2 May 1945), *Taking of Trieste* (British Pathé), displayed not only a variety of Allied flags but also, significantly, Josip Broz Tito's image. The film also shows the Yugoslav and New Zealand units fraternising after the liberation of Trieste by the Yugoslav army (1 May 1945).

The *Division in Italy–Danger in Trieste* (The Weekly Review, 1945), filmed by The New Zealand National Film Unit, offers a candid report on local people calling for the annexation of the area to Yugoslavia, and gives importance to the meeting between Major General Petar Drapsin, Yugoslav Army, and General Bernard Freyberg, New Zealand Expeditionary Force. The message here is still one of unity in the face of the defeated enemy, the Axis, rather than of ideological division.

By 1946, the official narrative had changed, with British and American newsreels reinforcing the idea of a delayed liberation completed with the taking over of the city by the Anglo-Americans (12 June 1945). In *April in Three Cities* (British Pathé, 1946), images of Italian and Yugoslav factions clashing in Trieste are juxtaposed with exterior shots of the League of Nations in Geneva, where the future of Trieste would be discussed. In *Italians, Yugoslavs in Conflict over Treaty for Italy* (Movietone News, 1946) the two nations are positioned in relation to the postwar rising tension between the Soviet Union and America. In the American newsreel *Three Cities* (MSA, 1952), Trieste is reduced to yet another city on the Iron Curtain, similar to Naousa (Greece) and Berlin (Germany). In the Italian newsreels, Trieste is once again pictured as divided from the fatherland. The newsreel *A Trieste* (Weekly Incom, 1946) opens with "Trieste is Ours" (Ignazio Amato, 1915), a motto sung during the First World War and put into celebratory lyrics in the Italian military marching songs "Trieste" (Sante Pizzuto Gambino, 1918), "Viva Trieste!" ["Hurrah Trieste!"] (Attilio Fiorone, 1918), and the Italian song "A Trieste!" ["To Trieste!"] (Ermenegildo Carosio, 1919), written when the city was already occupied by the Italian army. Accordingly, *Demarcation Line with Yugoslavia* (1946), repurposed in the Italian *Si tracciano i confini di Trieste* [*The Tracing of the Border in Trieste*] (Luce – Incom, 1954), suggests a climate of fear.

The relocation of Trieste on the fringes of the Iron Curtain stimulated the production of several Italian and foreign feature films, which depicted the world of international spies. These include *Les Loups chassent la nuit* (*Wolves Hunt at Night*, Bernard Borderie, 1952), released in Italy with the title *La ragazza di Trieste*, *Diplomatic Courier* (Henry Hathaway, 1952), and the television production *Il mondo trema* (*Black Box Affair*, Marcello Giorciolini, 1966). Among the British productions, *Tickets to Trieste* (James Mac Taggart, 1961), a BBC television series, testifies to the international interest in the city. While *La mano dello straniero* (*The Stranger's Hand*, Mario Soldati, 1954) offers one of the most convincing pieces of anticommunist propaganda, specific patriotic productions tackle themes related to the Italian unification of 1918, including *Trieste mia!* [*My Trieste!*] (Mario Costa, 1951), *La campana di San Giusto* [*The Bell of Saint Justus*] (Mario Amendola and Ruggero Macchi, 1954), and *Guai ai vinti* [*Woe to the vanquished*] (Raffaello Matarazzo, 1954), which advocate the annexation of the city to Italy in melodramatic tones. Other films inhabit in a variety of ways the narrative

of the invaded city, and introduce the climate of imminent danger associated with proximity to the communist (Slavic) world. Examples include *Clandestino a Trieste* (*Fugitive in Trieste*, Guido Salvini, 1951), *Trieste cantico d'amore* [*Trieste Love Song*] (Max Calindri, 1954), *Ombre su Trieste* [*Shadows on Trieste*] (Nerino Florio Bianchi, 1952), and *The Yellow Rolls Royce* (Anthony Asquith, 1964).

The only neorealist production to narrate a story set in the northeastern part of present day Italy is *Cuori senza frontiere* (*The White Line*, Luigi Zampa, 1950). The film follows the predicament of Giovanni Sebastian and his family, who attempt to keep a field divided between Italy and Yugoslavia. The film invests in clarifying the differences dividing catholics and communists, and in establishing the Italians' good nature. Of the several sequences enforcing the discourse, two are less overt but significant nonetheless. First, in Giovanni's words the character of Slovenian Stefano has been "*per casa*", "one of the house", and considered part of the family. Being a Slovenian that does not speak Slovenian in the film, however, Stefano is an italianised Slav. A detail recognisable only by those who knew/know the history of the indigenous Slavic population in the area. Second, set in the Slovenian villages of Repentabor/Monrupino and Križ/Santa Croce, the film does not use the Slovenian language or comment on the community's history. However, during the sequence depicting a catholic procession, the supposedly traditional outfit worn by the Italian women is the local traditional outfit of the Slovenian women. Such details are important as they show how Italian filmmakers could gloss over the Italian history of anti-Slavism and forced italianisation of the local population. In 2005, this discourse found a new embodiment in the Italian TV mini-series *Il cuore nel pozzo* (*The Heart in the Well*, Alberto Negrin), which focuses on the story of the *foibe* (sinkholes) that were used by Italians, Germans, and Yugoslavs to dispose of corpses on different occasions (Purini). The film is set in April 1945 in the Axis-occupied areas of present-day Istria (now partitioned between Slovenia and Croatia), close to the northeastern border to Italy (Trieste), where Tito's Yugoslav communist partisans are gaining ground, and the resident catholic Italians begin to feel afraid. This conflict drives the story, and it is symbolised by the grievance between Giulia, an Italian from southern Italy, and Novak, a Slav partisan leader. Giulia has a son with Novak, but she refuses to let him see the child. Novak continues to look for his son, and by following him we witness the alleged ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Yugoslavs in 1945. The end of the story transforms Novak into what he is accused of being from the very beginning: a violent and sanguinary man without God. The series offers a narrative of extreme violence that draws attention to the figure of the victimised mother, a tradition already in place in the above mentioned *Guglielmo Oberdan, il martire di Trieste*. The contrast between a clear evil and a clear good is blunt. It feeds into sensationalism when images of the Italians rounded up by the Yugoslavs recall similar scenes in films depicting the selection of Jews by the Nazis, as in *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, Alain Resnais, 1956). The film was promoted by a centre–right government bill in 2001 (parliamentary act n. 1874, IV legislation) and, since then, the sinkholes (*foibe*) have been a metonymic device able to link isolated events to images of Christian martyrdom (Verginella 71). In their nationalistic value, they have been mediated as the symbol of a genocide (Ballinger 212–213) committed by the Slav communists, a thesis that implies the exclusion of all the non-Italian people killed in the same sinkholes (Cogoy 18–19).

Back to the Conceptual Framework: Film Forms and Philosophy

The analysis of the above-indicated media productions (films and newsreels) confirmed the proposition that decades of media silence on specific events determined a phenomenon of

historical amnesia, which serves a political agenda. My archival research, however, added one unforeseen element to the variables I had considered, namely my discovery in the The Slovene National and Study Library (Narodna in Študijska Knjižnica) of a vast body of archived material that belonged to Vladimir Turina, a cousin of my father I had hitherto known nothing about—and, therefore, that I was part of the Slovenian community by more than affiliation.

This discovery changed my position concerning the artistic research, as I found myself simultaneously outside the domain of my research and inside of it, both as the researcher and the person who comes to terms with a lost heritage of antifascism. The importance of my situatedness appeared even more relevant when I developed the screenplays for my films. The issues emerging guided me back to the redefinition of the conceptual framework within which I wanted to articulate my work. The conceptual convergence of philosophy and creative practice I experienced as a result can only be outlined here, and only in a one-dimensional form, when in practice it evolved in a series of cycles of feedback between theory, interrogation of the archival material and the development of the screenplays, as explored by Colin Robson. I entered into a dialogue with thinkers that represent the twentieth century's turn from a focus on social history to cultural history, as they are fundamental to understand how questions on authorial agency and culturally inherited forms of discourse open debates on new areas of analysis. In so doing, I understood that interpretative keys derived from cultural studies are also applied to postmemory, in that they explore the dissonance between media-constructed narratives and personal memories and histories. Postmemory is a term Marianne Hirsch adopted in her studies of aesthetic accounts of historical violence and its intergenerational transmission. As she stated in a speech delivered at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Berlin: "My goal has been to think about how the retrospective glance of trauma might be expanded and redirected to open more multiple, alternate temporalities that might be more porous, more present and future oriented" (*Memory's Tenses*).

This goal, which I share, empowers aesthetic encounters as spaces for envisioning multiple temporalities and promoting social change. I wanted to put it into context within a philosophical networks of research that brought to the fore the study of memory in relation to history. This area of investigation intersected the tension between private and public histories, and between lived experience and the afterlife of memory as archival traces, sites of collective memory, and media constructed outlets. Arguably, Maurice Halbwachs in 1925 with the *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* offered the first study focused solely on the relationship between history, memory, and society. In this work, updated in 1950, Halbwachs proposed an idea of a public and private memory that is linked to the recovery of time by reconstructing it anew within collective representations. Halbwachs included commemorative events as reminders of what he called the collective memory, and suggested that they were essential to reinforce autobiographical memories, as otherwise they would fade with time.

In 1996, Pierre Nora claimed that collective memories are interpretations of the past but become detached from it, as the elites of a community draw on fictional elements to produce simulations of natural memory to support a specific political narrative and enforce collective amnesia. The determination of the mechanics of social memory entails the consideration of what collective memory leaves out of any commemorative events, and that which receives no media attention, which I call silenced history. The issue resonated with Walter Benjamin's work, as he offered a radical contribution to the study of the relationship between memory and narrative. In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", Benjamin makes the difference between *Erlebnis*, as the human experience of life (mentioned in relation to Proust's idea of *voluntary memory*) and *Erfahrung*, as the experience that enters tradition (as Proust's *involuntary*

memory), with which we do not entirely identify (155). In "Theses on the Philosophy of History", he concluded that history is grounded in the present and it is impossible to restore the experience of the past (255). For Benjamin, however, the images of the present can be used to right injustices of the past, as the past becomes whatever societies decide according to the struggle of memory among individuals ("N" 50). This position aligns with Hirsch's work on the aesthetic representations of traumatic past as the sites able to activate the need for change. The dialogue with this key theory, as a personal interrogation, supported the development of my first screenplay and film *Behind the Book* (2015), which followed the classic linear dramatic structure and prompted two fictional characters with questions about the retrospective endeavour of historical accounts, and their correlation to personal and collective memory.

Within my artistic research, however, it was Roland Barthes' work that offered the key to a reading of Italian cinema. In *The Rustle of Language*, Barthes comments on the relationship between the impersonal style of the historical narrative and its ability to divert the reader's attention from the limitations of the perspective presented (127–139; Wexler 145–155). The phenomenon indicates how the effect of reality [*effet de réel*] is a crucial problem in historical writing, as in *historiophoty* (White), because it proposes an unproblematic realism that is only a persuasive device. In retrospect, my reading of Barthes influenced also my decision to engage with the essay film as an interrogative form of filmmaking, which is able to break the *effet de réel* and leave the question open, addressed to the audience. This decision prompted the development of *Lunch with Family* (Romana Turina, 2016), which was written to explore how an epistemological investigation might reveal the impact of loss on the formation of identity. The writing of the screenplay led me to the concept of time-image and the espression of time and space as discontinuity and heterogeneity; a fracture in continuity that I found in the archives, and in my own family. Revelatory of the dimensions of personal memory, the time-image allows for cinematic visions of individual struggles: "situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, x). This line of thought aligned with the issue at the core of my second film, which questions the absence of public mediation of Italian anti-Slavism.



Figure 6: *Lunch with Family* (Romana Turina, 2016). Screenshot with link to video.

The effects on public space of memorialisation produced by decades of silence in a society deeply divided constituted the core of my third creative project, *San Sabba* (2016). In his afterword to *Aesthetics and Politics*, Jameson states that political history and literary history experience a certain return of the repressed (196). It is, however, in Jameson's *The Antinomies of Realism* that the return of the repressed is linked to the tension toward realism, and it is debated against the background of a mature postmodernism. Within postmodernism, the tension toward realism becomes a desire, a sense of anticipation and the knowledge of impossibility. This desire for a realism impossible to reach manifested itself during my work in the studio. When I edited *San Sabba*, I realised how Jameson's analysis of the tension towards realism, Hirsch's desire for alternate temporalities, and my tension towards regaining silenced history, resonated with Jacques Lacan's concept of *object petit a*, in that our ontological questions explore an object of desire that is continuously searched and never possessed.

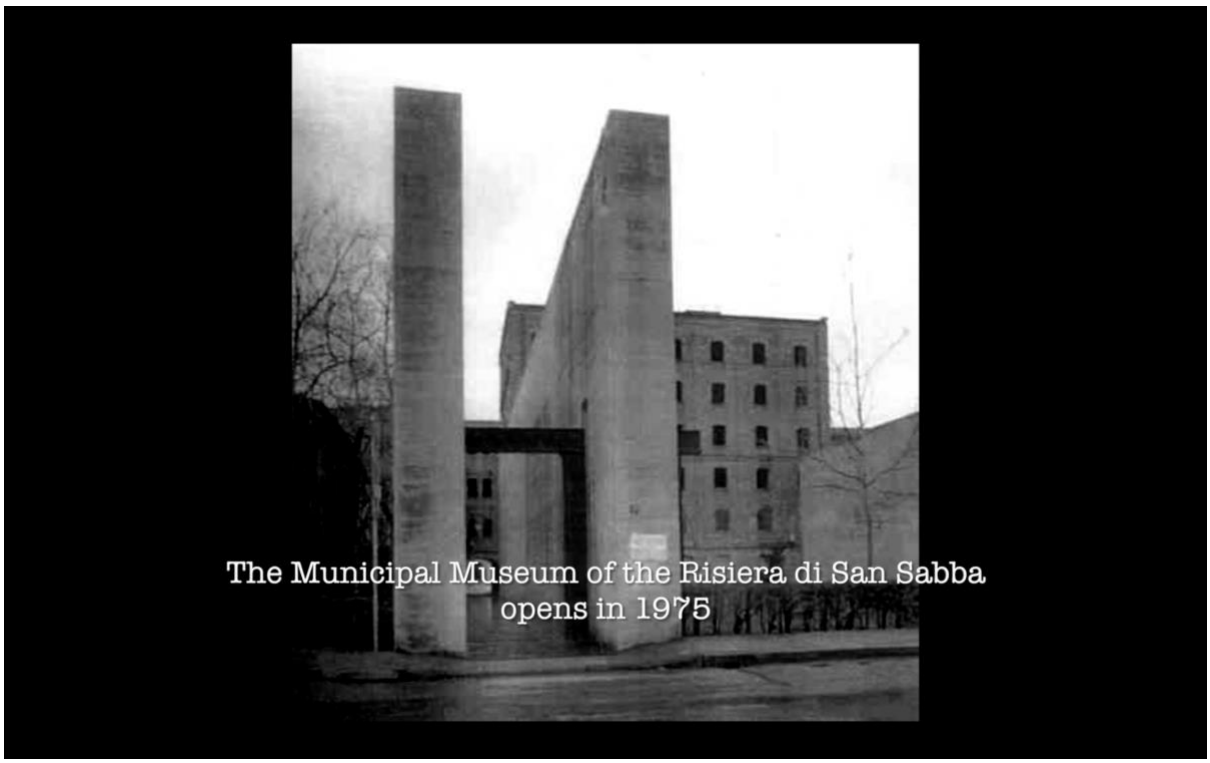


Figure 7: *San Sabba* (Romana Turina, 2016). Screenshot with link to video.

Conclusion

In this article I focused on the different strands of conceptual and artistic research that channelled my creative practice. Autoethnography, where my insider's perspective became integral to the understanding of what I studied, brought it all together. The resulting artefacts, screenplays and films, are my "contribution to knowledge" in what is a practice-based research (Skains 84), which is accompanied by a critical exegesis elaborated in my published work. As the title of this article implies, the research process coagulated around my exploration of the creative artefacts in themselves, how they affect me as a screenwriter, and the structures of films that were produced as a result. This strategy made my work academically recognisable, and offered a starting point for further interrogation.

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