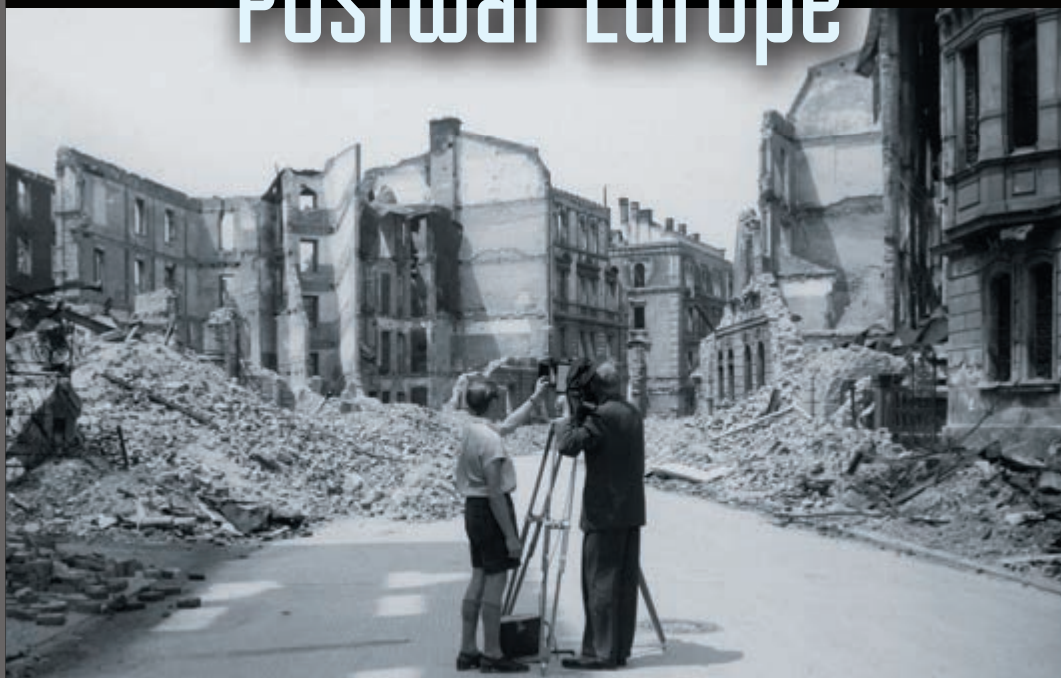


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CULTURE

IN TRANSITION

Non-Fiction Cinema in Postwar Europe



Visual Culture and the Reconstruction of Public Space

EDITED BY

LUCIE ČESÁLKOVÁ

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Amsterdam
University
Press

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*Edited by
Lucie Česálková,
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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

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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 Makarczyński. 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 Jarosław 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)¹ 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*” (“cinematication”: 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.² 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)³ 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),⁴ 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.archiviolute.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.archiviolute.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000000006/1/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.archiviolute.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000050662/1/anatomia-del-colore.html?startPage=0&jsonVal=%7B%22jsonVal%22:%7B%22query%22:%22Anatomia%20del%20colore%20%22,%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20%7D%7D.

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,⁵ 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.archivioluice.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.archivioluice.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.”⁶ 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.⁷ In a newsreel about the Sicilian main city,⁸ 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)⁹ is a film that describes the Olivetti industrial

6 *Le città crescono* (The cities grow, La settimana Incom, IT, July 17, 1957), https://patrimonio.archivioluice.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.archivioluice.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.archivioluice.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.archivioluice.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.

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.¹⁰

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.”¹¹

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

¹¹ 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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