Università
di Genova

MemWar

memorie e oblii delle guerre
e dei traumi del XX secolo

a cura di
Anna Giaufret e Laura Quercioli Mincer
con la collaborazione di Jean Cruz Holguin

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Mediating Memories. Bridging Gaps Between Non-fiction Film Heritage, Public History, and Media Studies[1]

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1. Clio unbound? The Blurred Boundaries of History in the Digital Age

How is the digital turn affecting the very notion of history and our knowledge of the past? How can we rely on non-fiction film heritage to prompt historical thinking? How can documentary cinema convey historical trauma? Could digital environments contribute at bridging the gap between generations, with regard to past traumatic events and memory-building, and help us in a better understanding of both media and history?

Our aim is to tackle some intermingling issues, which are located at the crossroads between the preservation and access to the film heritage, and notably non-fiction film, the role these materials hold in activities related to public history, i.e. initiatives aimed at non-academic audiences and prompting historical thinking, and media studies, and more in detail media literacy. In order to do so, we set a number of questions, which determine the above-mentioned interwoven fields in our age. As a matter of fact, we are persuaded the matter of film heritage, the ways to access it, the tools to convey an effective knowledge about the past, and the chances to reflect about it change across time. Accordingly, we would like to focus on contemporary opportunities and pitfalls to transmit collective memory and trauma.

The digital turn deeply influenced modes and objects of historiography, both in terms of research and teaching. Namely, at the core of this new, uncharted territory, is a contradiction: *the overabundance of sources and the very likely risk of facing, in a short matter*

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[1] The work reports about the methodological framework and activities of the HERA JRP PS project *ViCTOR-E. Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration and Reconstruction in Post-WW2 Europe*, in what regards the tasks of the Università degli Studi di Udine unit. As such, it has been commonly discussed and the authors share all responsibility for its content. Francesco Pitassio is responsible for writing paragraphs 1 and 2, Paolo Villa for writing paragraphs 3 and 4.

of time, the scarcity of contemporary sources: documents nowadays digitized or born-digital are at risk of disappearing in the next future, because of the obsolescence of software and protocols of storage, notwithstanding the hardware's one. As historian Roy Rosenzweig posits, in a highly influential work on history-making in the digital era:

> Thus historians need to be thinking simultaneously about how to research, write, and teach in a world of unheard-of historical abundance and how to avoid a future of record scarcity. Although these prospects have occasioned enormous commentary among librarians, archivists, and computer scientists, historians have almost entirely ignored them. In part, our detachment stems from the assumption that these are "technical" problems, which are outside the purview of scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Yet the more important and difficult issues about digital preservation are social, cultural, economic, political, and legal – issues that humanists should excel at. (Rosenzweig 2011: 6; Brügger 2018)

Film heritage preservation and access policies have similar concerns, which film and media historians should be more aware than they actually are. Firstly, digitization of audiovisual sources can greatly differ in terms of standards and implies different qualities of transmission from the analogic copy to its digitized version. Secondly, industrial practices determine technology available for digitization practices, and in the near future might affect the chances for a digitized copy to survive in the medium term, notwithstanding its circulation. Thirdly, technological permanent evolvement requires consequent fuelling of funding, for updating extant digitized heritage (Wengström 2013). Last, but not least, the enormous increase of access to film heritage, which digitization caused, does not imply *per se* selective knowledge: available sources can be nonetheless neglected. It is this major shift which originated and affected media and the experience of the past, as British media scholar Andrew Hoskins explains:

> 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, to repeat, makes visible our inability to encompass everything; the digital simultaneously affords a synchronic and diachronic unlimited depth of vision that at the same time makes us aware of the limits of the human capacity to arrest and to hold and to keep the archive. And thus the very idea of the future from this perspective is suffocated (Hoskins 2018: 5).

How to deal with this contradiction, spare past and contemporary sources, and make sense of this profusion?

Together with this crucial aporia, another issue comes to the fore: the *opaqueness of sources*, inasmuch as overabundance and reproducibility bring with them, at increasing speed, uncertainties concerning the same nature of the sources and make intricate their analysis. Whereas before the digital turn forgery could seldom and to a limited extent impact on historical sources, if only because of restricted access to them and the obstacles to material alteration, nowadays falsification of historical sources is much more common (Rosenzweig 2011).

Furthermore, the digital turn promoted the role of visuality in historical explanation and, altogether, prompted visual thinking. David J. Staley claims that visualization is based on synchronic, analogic, synthetic and non-linear thinking. Visualization therefore is an alternative and a concurrent tool in history writing. This latter is the mode through which historians traditionally design their information, which is therefore conceived as diachronic, logic, analytic and linear (Staley 2014: 29-58). Despite the fact that over the past fifty years historiography struggled to elude teleological narratives and linear accounts, what is of paramount importance is what implicitly Staley gestures to: *the increasing loss of logic and diachronic conceptions of the past.*

The demise of linear conceptions of the past and increasing opaqueness of historical sources jeopardize the transmission of factual knowledge about the past and make teaching historical thinking more challenging than beforehand. The crisis of historical thinking can originate in economic inequality, as some commentators recently put it (Schmidt 2018). However, we assume that this breakdown in traditional historical thinking is an outcome of broader epistemological shifts, which digitization induced. Beyond the issues of overabundance/ scarcity of sources, their opaque status and visual thinking, as opposed to linear renditions, the digital turn encourages grassroots citizenship and crowdsourcing: therefore, we are facing increasing alternative reconstructions of past events, based on unverified sources. Pseudohistory is not exactly the newest thing in town (Fritze 2009). The digital turn promoted the appropriation of historical past but fails to exert control over its circulating interpretations (Noiret 2015). The increasing blurring of the knowledge about the past, its memory, its traumas requires a doubled effort in fostering a renewed historical thinking, which is not based on replicating narratives about historical past, but rather deal

> with the processes and methods through which these historical narratives are constructed. Following this logic, historical knowledge should primarily be understood as related to competencies, and history educators should strive to enable students to develop the disciplinary skills necessary for critically scrutinizing historical sources and construct narratives from these (Thorp & Persson 2020: 892).

For achieving this goal, working with «problems, tensions, or difficulties that demand comprehension, negotiation and, ultimately, an accommodation that is never a complete solution» (Seixas 2017: 598) helps the knower to become familiar with historical sources and think historically. In the work of Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, these problems or tensions, operating as triggers for historical thinking, are six: a) Significance; b) Primary source evidence; c) Continuity and change; d) Cause and consequence; e) Historical perspective-taking; f) The ethical dimension (Seixas & Morton 2013). We shall get back to them.

2. History, Media, and Dangerous Supplements

Public history is located right at the crossroads between this demand for history, which is widespread within contemporary societies, and the need for reliability of historical accounts. Furthermore, public history is based on «shared authority» (Frisch 1990), therefore frequently relies on a grassroot approach we previously hinted at, as a recurrent characteristic in both media production and historical accounts. Moreover, public history advocates for transdisciplinary perspectives for forging path-breaking ways to deal with historiography in the digital age (Noiret 2014 & 2018). We believe that our research endeavour might provide the discussion in the field of public history with a «dangerous supplement», to echo W.J.T. Mitchell's motto referred to visual studies, as a productive addition to more traditional fields of art history and aesthetics (Mitchell 2002). The American academic builds his argument on a tradition of American elementary school, i.e. the «show and tell» ritual, in which pupils are requested to show an object and tell about it, to claim that his endeavour is to show how seeing happens: to nurture seeing, and the visual culture underpinning it, as a conscious activity. Can we ask students and ourselves to show historical objects and historicize, i.e. seeing their historicity, and engender historical thinking? And can we do this with media products? And could this convey the sense of past trauma? And how could non-fiction films contribute to this process?

We posit that media not only transfer contents which belonged to the past, but properly shape our memory and mould our sense of past events and provide communities with a collective grid against which individual memories are located. As German memory scholar Astrid Erll describes:

> Just like memory, media do not simply reflect reality, but instead offer constructions of the past. Media are not simply neutral carriers of information about the past. What they appear to encode – versions of past events and persons, cultural values and norms, concepts of collective identity – they are in fact first creating. In addition, specific modes of remembering are closely linked to available media technologies (Erll 2011: 114).

Accordingly, the role of media as both a tool for and a subject of public history is self-evident. Historical visual evidence circulates in overwhelming amount, but is often left unquestioned as sources: *the fallacy of transparency, when it comes to visual media is increased*, as widely debated. German film historian Anton Kaes highlighted how much cinema homogenized public memory and originated stereotypes which circulated time and again (Kaes 1992), inducing what German memory studies scholar Wulf Kansteiner defined a «low-intensity collective memory»: widely circulating, with a limited number of images, characters and narratives, but highly effective in shaping collective cognitive coordinates (Kansteiner 2002). Since memory is the not only the outcome of experience or conveyed by the representation of the past, but of ritual iteration, as Winter and Sivan put it, this repeated circulation of stereotyped images from or about the past is effective in building collective memory (Winter & Sivan 1999).

Here is the fertile alliance between public history and media literacy, or the dangerous supplement of associating these two frameworks. On the one hand, public history incorporates into its scope crucial issues as public engagement, shared authority, and ample dissemination: without lay public, no history. These assumptions are pivotal in dealing with historical media products, which are public in nature, and are a full-fledged part of the sources we need to focus on, when inquiring how communities conceive of respective past. On the other hand, media literacy is a discipline aimed at deconstructing and interpreting how the action of media shapes our individual and social experience. We claim that media literacy is beneficial in a better understanding of three things at once. Firstly, media literacy is pivotal in analysing historical media sources and, accordingly, avoiding the fallacy of transparency: media literacy nurtures critical thinking in looking at media products and promotes awareness of the norms and practices leading to their existence, including their action in selecting and heralding values and the viewing positions they imply. Secondly, *media literacy is not a transhistorical discipline*, but needs to adapt to varying historical circumstances and related issues of power (Hobbs & McGee 2014); in fact, media literacy has to adjust to historical and regional modes of production, to the subjects responsible for it, in order to disclose the role media held within a given society and period. By doing so, media literacy raises awareness of the function media played in shaping our sense of identity, community, and memory. Last, but not least, media literacy discloses how *the past is construed by way of multiple layers of memory* which the media contributed at producing and overlapping (Anderson 2001; Ebbrecht 2007). If we refer to the notion of 'cultural trauma', i.e. the work a community undertakes, through cultural production, to relocate meanings, re-establish social bonds, and restore a collective identity which events or processes jeopardized (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, Sztompka 2004; Alexander 2012), then focusing on past cultural products describing what was perceived as traumatic is a way to understand

our identity and pass to next generations the sense of experiences which shaped our collective memories. As a matter of fact, communities regulate their cultural production and sharpen the focus onto specific subjects, while silencing others, as a way to make sense of reality during transitions which are thought to be demanding. *Historical assessment, i.e. how cultural and media production renders past events, is a way to convey the sense of trauma, or to perform the work of cultural trauma.*

American scholar Michelle J. Bellino postulates that historical thinking and media literacy have a dispositional alignment.

> Media literacy is […] 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. The implications of this theoretical alignment for classroom practice and professional development is potentially far-reaching, illustrating the need for clear disciplinary frameworks for teaching media literacy (Bellino 2008: n.p.).

Moreover, the alliance of public history and media literacy might greatly contribute at *promoting the appropriation of history*: by tutoring users to basic rules of audiovisual storytelling, they can make use of historical sources in order to produce consistent historical accounts. As previously mentioned, Seixas and Morton believe that working around some basic tensions or problems, which rather than static notions actively elicit historical thinking. Among them are listed 'significance', i.e. why certain events and/or persons are relevant, while other neglected; and 'ethical dimension', which refers to the judgement on past actions and actors, to dealing with past crimes and perpetrators, and with the obligations of memory we have towards past victims (Seixas & Morton 2013). We believe that lending an ear, through media literacy, to the voices and silence of media representations and their archives and making use of these materials to create digital environments for dealing with controversial and traumatic issues is an effective way for nurturing historical thinking.

How can we make use of sources within the archives of the moving image, for the benefit of teaching?

Possibly, by *showing and seeing*! Within a digital environment aimed at enhancing multiple causality (Leon 2017), we associate historical events, as referred to WW2 and its aftermath, with its non-fiction cinema's representation. The association of events and media representations has two aims: firstly, exposing students to primary sources which acknowledged institutions such as archives of the moving image digitized, with established protocols, and creating the awareness of the significance of

their preservation and restauration practice, as a way to avoid apocryphal transmission; secondly, stimulating critical thinking by collation, i.e. by comparing received wisdom about a traumatic event, and its contemporary representation, which created its memory, according to discursive and visual patterns, under the guidance of an instructor. As a side effect, this endeavour aims at raising awareness of the existence of qualified access points to non-fiction film heritage and, accordingly, of the difference in the circulation of moving images and related historical discourse.

3. Media Education in Action: ViCTOR-E's Teaching Toolkit

Within such methodological and theoretical frames, HERA project ViCTOR-E (Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration and Reconstruction in Post-WW2 Europe), and specifically its Italian unit, includes among its goals the creation of a digital toolkit for history teachers on the online platform Historiana. Rather than simply offering written instructions and suggestions, Historiana – provided by EuroClio, the European Association of History Educators, and Europeana, a digital library gathering holdings from several European cultural institutions – allows users to combine historic sources like films or photographs with questions, exercises, and explanations into digital learning paths. It also offers interactive tools to work with and on the digitised sources: 'analysing' contextualises images with descriptions and data, zooming in to observe their details; 'sorting' asks users to divide them into specific categories; 'comparing', as its name suggests, focuses on comparing and contrasting two or more images, highlighting similarities and differences with different colours; 'discovering' presents an interactive map, revealing the connections among the sources.

At present, Historiana's 'activity builder' does not include the chance to work with videos; they can be simply uploaded or, if already available on some other platforms (Youtube, Vimeo, Dailymotion, INA), embedded into the teaching setting. Nonetheless, EuroClio has recently expressed the intention to improve its platform in this direction; therefore, ViCTOR-E's digital toolkit can provide fruitful insights on how to lead Historiana towards a wider use of film sources.

Many online platforms for history education, in fact, still do not include films as teaching materials. Undeniably, learning with audiovisual material usually demands a rather complex technological infrastructure, while also requiring teachers and students to be familiar with a different set of knowledge and skills than the ones usually applied to written or visual sources. At the same time, the awareness of cinema as a primary historical source has been growing among teachers, who would generally welcome its use in their classes. As some seminars we conducted at the University of Udine revealed, what holds teachers back is the need to better understand cinema *per sé*: its specificities, its history and rhetoric, its production and practice. This self-admitted statement proves the relevance, for both students and teachers, of *film*

and media literacy, a crucial starting point for *education through and with films and media*: understanding what a film is, how it works, how to carry out a careful, critical viewing is the very first step for any use of film in a classroom. The two sides are strictly intertwined: *educating with film requires media literacy*. In learning history through film traces, students learn how to watch films, what cinema was and still is, in all its different forms: not only entertainment or art, but also a recording and/or propaganda tool, advertising means, a way to explore reality, to shape and reshape collective memories and identities. Only when considering this whole range of possibilities, it is conceivable to develop valuable media understanding and historical critical thinking through films.

Following the Stanford History Education Group model[2], ViCTOR-E has envisioned two different kinds of teaching activity: 'general activities' that focus on broad historical topics, presenting a variety of visual sources, with a progression of tasks to fulfil; shorter 'at-the-source activities', devoted to a single film, whose purpose is to create knowledge and critical skills towards audiovisual documents. For instance, *Cities in Ruins. Bombings and destruction in WWII Europe* is a rather long (60 to 80 minutes) 'general activity' about the representation of destroyed cities in Europe during and immediately after the war. Divided into three steps, each one with several questions, it includes a newsreel, a documentary, photographs and printings, and explores the ideological features of war-time information, the theme of 'ruins' in European culture from Romanticism to WWII, the rhetoric of post-war urban

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[2] Founded in 2002 and based in Stanford, the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) 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 consider films as historic sources. Among the very few recent initiatives to foster digital history learning through films, it is worth mentioning the project *E-story. Media and History: From cinema to the web. Studying, representing and teaching European History in the digital era*, funded by the European program Erasmus Plus and involving institutions from Italy, Spain, Poland, Hungary, United Kingdom, Slovenia and the Netherlands, including EuroClio. «E-STORY objective is that of enriching teaching of History mainly at 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/ ; 24.04.2021). Its online platform makes texts, photographs, and films 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 through periodical reports examines the ongoing situation concerning 'history and television' and 'history and the web' in each one of the seven countries involved.

resurrection. The shorter (10 to 15 minutes) «at-the-source activity» *From Ruins to Reconstruction: «Recco, l'altra Cassino»* concentrates instead on a single newsreel, encouraging students to get an idea of what newsreels were.

Each teacher can choose which parts of these activities to conduct or to skip, and in what order (though the given sequence is recommended); to assign them as homework or to carry them out in the classroom; together, in small groups, or individually. Most importantly, by registering to Historiana teachers can modify the activities according to their needs and desires. However, though moderately flexible, the teaching setting is inherently stable: a short explanation introduces each task (a longer introduction opens the activity, giving some accurate historical information); students complete the assignments; lastly, an invitation to discuss with the classmates and the teacher closes the activity. This three-step, vaguely Montessorian, scheme is based on the EAS – Episodio di Apprendimento Situato (Situated Learning Episode) methodology (Revoltella 2013 and 2016) and proves particularly successful when teaching with media. Instead of giving students a comprehensive, frontal explanation first and then assigning tasks and exercises, this method overthrows 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 dialogue between students and instructor, when the latter makes sure the topics have been correctly conveyed, goes deeper into explanations, and clarifies any possible misunderstanding.

The use of film for teaching history implies risks and concerns. In the already mentioned seminars, all students (16 to 19 years old) showed a clear interest in using films as history sources. What most impressed them was the images' strength and clarity to (re)present the past, to establish a direct contact with long-ago personalities or events, ultimately with *history itself*, removing 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 to somehow suggest or reinforce the widespread idea of documentary cinema'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, any film being a point of view on reality, expressing certain ideas, values, and beliefs. So, the need for 'moderators' (textbooks, teachers, digital infrastructures) is even more essential when teaching with films, in order not to take for a supposed historical 'truth' what is simply a partial, culturally and ideologically charged perspective. Just like written and visual sources, films harbour deep meanings and call for critical interpretation, however counterintuitive and difficult this might appear at first sight to students and those unfamiliar with historical methodology (Martin & Wineburg 2008: 305-306).

Therefore, a set of additional instruments, like presentations, documents and a glossary, will be also included in the toolkit, providing clear and concise information to contextualise and better understand the films.

4. Teaching the «Giulian Issue» Through Films

The features of this digital environment for learning can be understood when looking at two specific activities dealing with the cinematic representation of the Giulian issue, the first on the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus (*L'esodo istriano-dalmata*), the second on the Allied administration of Trieste from 1945 to 1954, and the city's return to Italy (*Trieste e il confine orientale*). «Giulian Issue» (*questione giuliana*) is the umbrella term referring to the complex historic events and problems related to Venezia Giulia in WWII and post-war years: the violent retaliations committed by both parts – Italian and Yugoslav – on the other, such as the *foibe* massacres; the setting of the new border; Trieste's Allied administration lasting nine years before its restitution to Italy; the forced displacement of Italian-speaking Istrians and Dalmatians (Pupo 2006; Darovec 2010; Varutti 2017). Working on these cases cast light on the complexity of teaching sensitive historical episodes, that can be related to still relevant collective traumas in regional, national, or even international debates and identities, requiring tactful handing (Rocchi 2020; Wansink et al. 2020).

The border region of Venezia Giulia lies at the crossroads of Italian, German, and Slavic cultures, and includes the provinces of Gorizia, Trieste (both today in Italy), Pula/Pola and Rijeka/Fiume (today, respectively, in Slovenia and Croatia). After WWII the region, partly freed from Allied forces and partly from the Yugoslav army, was divided into two occupation zones. In 1947, the Paris Peace Treaty established the so-called Morgan Line as the official border between Italy and Yugoslavia, assigning Istria and Dalmatia – parts of Italy in the inter-war period and with centuries-old Italian-speaking communities – to Yugoslavia, while Gorizia was returned to Italy. Trieste remained under Allied jurisdiction for another seven years, until 1954, despite Italy's vehement claims for its restitution.

Meanwhile, starting from 1945 and especially after 1947, an estimated 300.000 Italians left Istria and Dalmatia: The Treaty determined they could remain only by losing their Italian citizenship and becoming Yugoslav; otherwise, Yugoslavia had the right to expel them within one year. A process of traumatic, violent displacement took place, a historical event that remained neglected and almost forgotten for decades within the Italian public discourse. Only since 2004 the exodus has been officially remembered on February 10th, *Giorno del Ricordo*, together with the remembrance of the victims of Yugoslav retaliations against Italian civilians, the so-called *foibe massacres*.

The first teaching activity, *L'esodo istriano-dalmata*, starts with an introduction explaining this intricate geographical and historical context behind the Giulian

issue. The first part is centred on *Pola, addio!* (Goodbye, Pula!, 1947), a special number of *La Settimana Incom* newsreel portraying the exodus. The activity asks students to concentrate on details and close-ups: why so much attention is reserved to old people? What feelings does the film want to convey, and what role do the music and the voice over play? Then, it focuses on the Roman Arena of Pula, the town symbol that is time and again mentioned and shown (1). Defined «a Colosseum at the borders of Italy» by the commentary, the ancient Roman building serves as an evidence of the Latin roots of Istria, themselves epitomizing the Italian dominance. An exercise of compare-and-contrast proposes two postcards depicting the Arena, the first dating back from the Hapsburg Empire and the second from post-war Yugoslavia, linking the film to other visual sources and putting in perspective its Italo-centric look on the monument. The following exercise asks the user to place seven stills from the movie under two different labels, «Signs of Italian belonging» and «Signs against Yugoslavia», to highlight how visual elements concur to the patriotic message of the film (2).

The two following newsreels present centres for Giulian children in Rome and in Sappada, on the Italian Alps. The questions highlight some meaningful aspects in these short films: the children as innocent victims embodying a nostalgic desire for Istria; the patriotic accent closing both newsreels, with Italian and Istrian flags intertwined; the presence of rationalist architecture from the Fascist era, notably the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana or Squared Colosseum: a way of recalling Pula's Arena, but also to reframe the signs of a recent, haunting past.
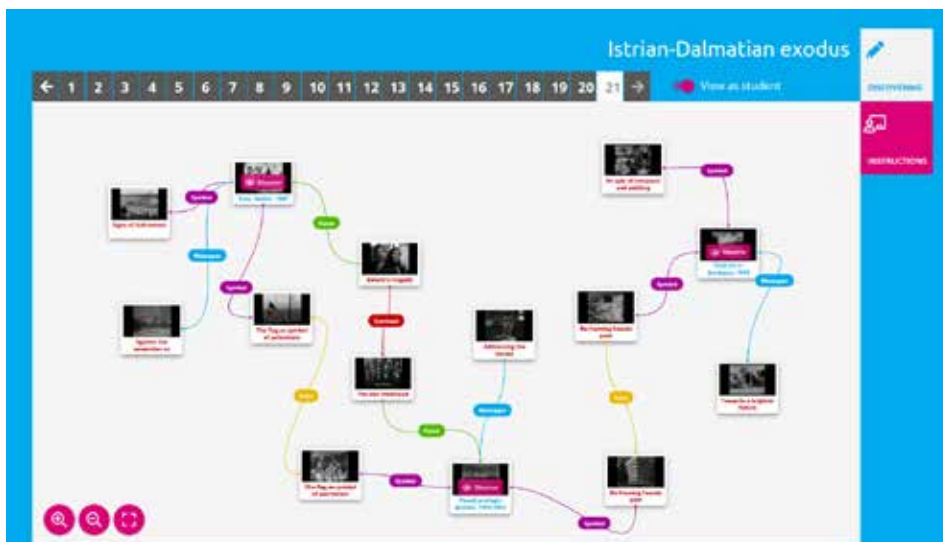
Buildings from Fascist time recur also in *Fertilia dei Giuliani*, or *Giuliani in Sardegna* (1949), a short film about the Sardinian village of Fertilia, founded during the regime after the reclamation of marshlands near Alghero. Never completed and left abandoned during the war, Fertilia was later assigned to Giulian refugees. Clearly scripted and acted, the documentary re-enacts the settlement of Giulian people in Fertilia like a mythical adventure, reminiscent of ancient legends of foundation and the American colonisation of the Far West. The tragedy of the exodus seems to overturn into an epic of conquest and success, only slightly clouded by nostalgia for the lost land.

After asking the students to point out the sequences that structure the narrative, the following questions stress out how the story reminds viewers of famous tales. The refugee's arrival from the sea (3), under the guidance of a charismatic leader (meaningfully, the priest), recalls the *Odyssey*, explicitly mentioned three times. The following scenes of the ghost village brought to new life by the men's efforts remind of both ancient myths (like Aeneas' foundation of Alba Longa in the *Aeneid*), and the epic of conquest that western movies made popular. The students are encouraged to reflect on how the natural and the architectural landscapes are depicted, how the

1. On the previous page: Still from *Pola, addio!*, directed by Giovanni Vitrotti, 1947.
2. On the previous page: Historiana educational toolkit: 'Sorting' functionality.
3. On the previous page: Still from *Fertilia dei Giuliani*, directed by Enrico Moretti, 1949.
4. Historiana educational toolkit: 'Discovering' functionality.

film completely omits the Fascist origins of Fertilia, and how the Giulians seem to overcome every obstacle without any help. With wives and children finally joining the men, the film closes on a bright note, dismissing any possible nostalgia for the past or uncertainty for the future. By romanticising the Giulians' settlement with the adventurous charms of epic poems and Hollywood western movies, the film downplays the historical reasons behind the event, which, like the abandoned village, seems suspended in a void, the unspecified time and place of legends and tales.

As it is clear in this last case, ViCTOR-E's learning activities are always designed as a gradual path of discovery, starting from the understanding of single elements, continuing with broader questions, to end up testing the overall comprehension of the film's general message. The need to grasp a wider sense of historical parables and dynamics is an essential requirement expressed by history teachers. The last step of *L'esodo istriano-dalmata* is therefore a map made up of stills from all the films, that the students gradually discover by clicking on them: in doing so, connections with other images are highlighted, creating a conceptual net that sums up the entire topic (4).

Trieste e il confine orientale follows a similar structure, highlighting the importance that the Trieste issue had for the Italian public opinion at that time.

The first film the activity presents is *Genti giulie* (Giulian People, 1949), produced by the National League for Trieste. The joyful entrance of the Italian army in Gorizia serves as counterpoint to emphasise Trieste's hopeful wait to be reunited

5. Still from *Genti Giulie*, produced by Lega Nazionale per Trieste, 1949.

to Italy – but a useless wait, at the end of the Forties. To reveal the discursive and ideological patterns at play in the films, overcoming the spontaneous and even naïf trust usually assigned to documentaries, students are asked to concentrate on specific elements like framing, music, or the voice over, to understand how these films are always historically and ideologically biased. Commentaries and their accordance or tension with visuals are usually an essential point to highlight. In *Genti giulie* the voice over compares Giulians with the first Christian martyrs, implying a similarity between national belonging, religious faith, and willingness to self-sacrifice. The film depicts Venezia Giulia, and implicitly the whole country, as a victim of the Communist threat: The comparison with Christian martyrs works perfectly in this strong anti-Communist stance, given the notorious aversion for religion of Communist regimes. Moreover, stressing out the patriotism of the Giulians, the film advocates for the Italianness of Venezia Giulia rather than recalling its century-old multicultural identity. In so doing, it aims to build up an assertive, monologic memory, typical of national identity strategies, while silencing and almost forgetting part of its past (Assmann 2011: 45-47). The images and references to WWI cemeteries and monuments – a common feature in all filmic sources dealing with the Giulian issues – link the sacrifices of the last conflict to those of the previous war, both aimed to reunite Italian-speaking areas to the motherland (5). From a musical point of view, the use of *Va' Pensiero* from Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*, implying a similitude between Trieste people and the Jews in Babylon nostalgically remembering their homeland and Jerusalem, is a strong reminder of the Italian Risorgimento and its patriotic ideals, displaying the Trieste issue as the last step to a not-yet-fully completed national unity. Requiring

6. Still from *L'Italia a Trieste*, directed by Guido Gianni, 1955.

the students to reflect on these aspects is essential to avoid a superficial viewing, and to decipher the film's complexity.

Not only photographs and films can be useful visual means in a history class: maps provide a clear idea of the geographical scale of the events, and in a compare-and-contrast exercise the three different borderlines proposed by Italy, Yugoslavia and Allied forces at the end of the war are confronted. *La linea bianca* (The White Line, 1947) represents the tangible effects of the new border, no more just as an abstract line on the map: roads and villages are divided, families must abandon their homes, the frontier cuts through gardens, squares and streets, without any consideration for the people living in the area.

The final return of Trieste to Italy is celebrated in *L'Italia a Trieste* (Italy in Trieste), a short film by Gianni Guido released in 1955. Interestingly, the film shows at length not only the parades and the cheerful crowd welcoming Italian representatives in Trieste after the London Memorandum established its comeback to Italy, but also the activities of the harbour, its industrial quartiers, factories and workplaces: Trieste will greatly benefit from being part of Italy again, but the country as well regains an important harbour and industrial centre. This attention to the economic side of the reunification (also visible in the earlier *Trieste industriale*, Industrial Trieste, 1950) marks a difference with the films from the late Forties. The visuals of *L'Italia a Trieste* is also scrutinised by pointing out the role of colour in the film, and how it is exploited to present time

and again the Italian tricoloured flag in various forms. Lastly, the film mentions three relevant historical figures for the city, who fought for its inclusion to Italy since the 19th century (Guglielmo Oberdan, Nazario Sauro, Gabriele D'Annunzio). The activity shortly presents them through a series of images, asking the students to pick up one of the three to continue researching about his role in the history of Venezia Giulia.

Both activities demand the students to actively engage with the films. They provide a clear structure to put them in context and in contact with other visual or textual sources. From more analytical, detail-centred questions, the teaching path gradually leads to broader issues, conveying a general understanding of historical facts through the specific visual, rhetoric, cultural, and ideological patterns of audiovisual sources.

Using non-fiction films as primary sources for history teaching undeniably represents a precious opportunity. However, it requires an adequate infrastructure that digital environments can facilitate to create, and specific methodological cautions, being films themselves complex historic products. Teaching *with* films always implies teaching *about* films, *education with media* is always *media education*. The development of analytical and critical skills towards media is today a primary goal of any didactic program, providing students with critical knowledge, skills, and competences of the greatest relevance in the current, complex media landscape.

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