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Multidirectional Sites of Memory in Italian Holocaust Documentaries

Maurizio Cinquegrani

Abstract

This article investigates the ways in which film can use the act of witnessing and the exploration of significant locations in order to exhume memories of the deportation of Italian Jews to Auschwitz in 1943-1944. It aims at doing so by focusing on the neglected area of study provided by Italian documentaries about the Holocaust. In particular the article addresses two documentary films where testimonial performances and topographical investigation will be analysed by means of the conceptualisations of site of memory and multidirectional memory.

Keywords

Michael Rothberg; Pierre Nora; Italy; Rome; Venice; Florence; Auschwitz; Chelmno; Survivors; WWII; Holocaust; Memory; Sites of memory; Multidirectional memory.

Outward Journey

Return Journey

Bio

Bibliography

Filmography

Suggested Citation

Between December 1943 and January 1945, from an underground track below platform 21 at Milan Central Station hundreds of Jews were transported on cattle wagons to the concentration and death camps in Auschwitz II–Birkenau, Mauthausen, Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbrück, Flossenbürg, and the Italian transit camps in Fossoli and Bolzano. Deportees on board of large trucks would arrive from the San Vittore prison to the entrance on Via Ferrante Aporti and would proceed to the lower level of the station. A memorial was inaugurated at this site of memory on 27 January 2013, on the 68th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, and here Italian musician and writer Moni Ovadia performed Itzhak Katzenelson's *Song of the Murdered Jewish People* in front of Liliana Segre, an Italian survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in January 1944, in the performance *Binario 21* (2010). Katzenelson was taken to Auschwitz a couple of months after Segre and murdered on 1 May 1944; his poem was written in the detention camp in Vittel, France; it was then

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placed inside glass bottles and buried under a tree, from where it was recovered after the war. *Song of the Murdered Jewish People* acknowledges the enormity of the process of annihilation which unfolded "from Greece to Norway to the outskirts of Moscow" (Katzenelson 1980: 16). Ovadia's performance captures the vast impact of the Holocaust across Europe while using a specific location which tells the story of one of many national groups of Jews who were murdered by the Nazis, the Italian Jews who were first victims of the fascist Racial Laws and then of genocide.

The process of extermination across occupied Europe evoked by Ovadia reveals that the deportation of over 10,000 Italian Jews to death camps began after German troops invaded Italy in September 1943, and that 7,700 of them were murdered at their arrival or soon after. This article aims to reflect upon the landscapes where this persecution took place, the familial locations associated with the pre-war years, the places where the killings took place, and the itinerary followed by those who returned to Italy after the liberation of the camps. My main interest is not with the crystallised past of archival photographs and footage, but with the present-day landscapes and the traces of the past inscribed on them, on the stories that these places can tell, on the relation between the living and the sites where past and present, memory and history wrestle one another. Pierre Nora's concept of site of memory (1984, 1989) and Michael Rothberg's work on multidirectional memory (2009) will lead an investigation which focuses on two documentary films as case studies and on their transversal themes, spaces, narratives and contexts.

The deportation of Italian Jews during the Second World War has been addressed in a number of documentaries which are largely based on survivors' testimonies recorded in Italy and on the inclusion of archival material from the 1930s and the 1940s.¹ The use of the camps in Auschwitz as locations, a narrative strategy which characterises a significant number of Holocaust documentaries about the extermination of the Eastern European Jewry, has rarely been seen in Italian documentary cinema. This article discusses a significant exception and looks at the ways in which, beside the use of significant sites of memory in Italy, Auschwitz II-Birkenau has been used as a location in Ruggero Gabbai's *Memoria. I sopravvissuti raccontano (Memory. Survivors Speak, 1997)*. This documentary is based on a series of interviews with survivors recorded both in the cities where these men and women lived before the war and in Auschwitz II-Birkenau, on the site of the death camp where their families were exterminated. The long journey to occupied Poland in the dreadful conditions of the cattle wagons used by the Nazis is recalled in *Memoria* in a series of detailed testimonies accounting for the ways in which the segregation and discrimination experienced by the Jews since the introduction of the Racial Laws in 1938 turned into a genocidal persecution.

Three quarters of the Italian Jews deported to Auschwitz were murdered at their arrival or died soon after; those who survived would return to Italy after a long journey across the ruins of Eastern and Central Europe. Italian writer Primo Levi gave an account of his return journey from Auschwitz to his home in Turin in *La Tregua*,² a book which provides the narrative basis for my second case study, Davide Ferrario's *La Strada di Levi (Levi's Journey, 2007)*, a documentary which returns to the locations of the itinerary followed by Levi after the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945. As we shall see, *La Strada di Levi* addresses later historical events and social changes which took place in the locations visited by Levi after the war, and exemplifies Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory as it draws "attention to the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance" (1989: 11).

With a focus on the journeys exemplified in *Memoria* and *La Strada di Levi*, my analysis uses Nora's idea of site of memory, or *lieu de mémoire* - defined as "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" (1996: xvii) - in order to provide a spatial reading of the experience of the Jews who were deported from Italy to the death camps, who returned home after the war, and eventually to Auschwitz later in their lives.³ Nora's work has been enormously influential in the study of twentieth-century European history and yet his

theorisation of history has also attracted significant criticism. Among those who have challenged the notion of site of memory, Dominick LaCapra has argued that Nora's polarized conceptions of memory and history, with the latter eclipsing the former, testifies to a sense of loss while representing an attempt to neutralise trauma (LaCapra 1998: 18-19). And yet, while sites of memory are not necessarily bound to the evocation of trauma, Nora's work answers the necessity of a spatial experience of the past, a symptom of what he has discussed in terms of a transformation of history as a reconstruction of the past into memory as a perpetually actual phenomenon (LaCapra 1989: 7-8). This is a crucial aspect of the concept of site of memory and one which is particularly useful when addressing documentaries where personal memories interact with history in the attempt to face and provide an answer to what Nora (1989: 8) calls a "hopelessly forgetful modern society". In this context, *Memoria* and *La Strada di Levi* aim to exhume and unlock site-specific memories and to pass them on to the postgeneration as they deal with an invisible and fractured past which is enacted in words and images, in the testimonies of the survivors and in the use of locations.

Outward Journey

Gabbai's *Memoria* opens with an extract from the poem which introduces Primo Levi's memoir *If This is a Man*: "Voi che vivete sicuri nelle vostre tiepide case, voi che trovate tornando a sera il cibo caldo e i visi amici: considerate se questo è un uomo" ["You who live safe In your warm houses / You who find, returning in the evening / Hot food and friendly faces / Consider if this is a man" (trans. by Stuart Woolf)].⁴ *Memoria* uses the two main categories of sites of memory which are implied in the words evoked here by Primo Levi, a personal landscape made of familial places, meals and faces, and the spaces of the camps where the prisoners experienced the process of dehumanisation orchestrated by the Nazis. On the one hand, *Memoria* uses familial sites of life before the war, the private spaces of the survivors' apartments and the public spaces of the streets, squares, markets and monuments; these locations are associated by survivors at once with the warmth of their memories from the period which preceded the introduction of the Benito Mussolini's Racial Laws and with the suffering which accompanied their inception in 1938. On the other hand, *Memoria* is filmed on location in the places where the persecution and extermination took place, including the detention centres and collection points on Italian soil and the death camp in Auschwitz.

The first part of the film introduces survivors from Rome, Venice and Florence, as they tell a story of a persecution which began to unfold on the background of the celebrated buildings of these cities. Possibly named after the Venetian word *gheto* (tr. foundry) or the Jewish term *ghet*— the two oldest Jewish ghettos in Europe were established in 1516 in Venice and in 1555 in Rome; both districts feature prominently in the first part of *Memoria* and the use of these locations inscribe the memories of persecution in the built environment of these cities, and specifically in the districts associated with the Jewish communities of Rome and Venice. In doing so, *Memoria* establishes a topographical connection to the testimonies and the locations where the oppression of the Italian Jews unfolded and a temporal relationship between anti-Semitism in the fascist era and its precursor in the early modern period and the nineteenth century. The main focus of the testimonies provided in the ghettos by the survivors is the introduction of Racial Laws and the time when Jewish children were forced to leave public schools while friends and neighbours turned their backs on Jewish families. The first scene is filmed at the site of the ghetto in Rome, a section of the eleventh historic district of the city, between the Porticus Octaviae and the Tiber River. Here, Mario Spizzichino, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in April 1944, sings "Mamma", a popular song composed by Cesare Andrea Bixio and written by Bixio Cherubini in 1940. As the camera leads the viewer along the narrow alleys and the markets of the district, Romeo Rubino Salmoni, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in June 1944, gives an account of poverty in the ghetto and yet he also remembers the good days when his mother would cook pasta and broccoli. The warmth of this memory brings Salmoni to claim that his family was accepted and loved by their neighbours. In the attempt to describe what escapes description and on the background of private

and public sites of memory, these survivors provide their testimonies in the attempt to intertwine history and memory, past and present, and their testimonies result in one of those cinematic representational strategies where - as Bill Nichols suggests - "we can see in what witnesses say now the continuation of the past in the present, its corporeal incarnation through speech and action" (Nichols 1994: 4).

The persistence of past events in present-day landscapes also emerges from the following sequence, which is filmed in Venice and begins with a shot taken from a ferry on the Grand Canal approaching the church of San Geremia in Cannaregio. Lina Navarro, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in June 1944, is in the ghetto located in the *sestiere* of Cannaregio, and specifically she is standing on the Fondamenta Ghetto. Her testimony accompanies another shot of the Grand Canal, and she later continues her account of the events while standing outside the school she attended before being banned in 1938 as a consequence of the Racial Laws. This is followed by an interview with Virginia Gattegno, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944, and who now talks about the impact of the Racial Laws on her life while sitting on a bench in Campo del Ghetto Nuovo (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Campo del Ghetto Nuovo, Venice, Italy (photograph by Maurizio Cinquegrani 2018)

The following scene opens with a panoramic view of Florence followed by images of a parade in medieval clothing in the city centre. Nedo Fiano, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in May 1944, also recalls the introduction of the Racial Laws in 1938 and the way in which they were

passively accepted by the Italian people. These testimonies are located in a present shaped by the past and their inclusion in *Memoria* reflects Aaron Kerner's idea that "when documentaries incorporate witnesses into their narrative, manifesting in the form of testimony, the presumption is that the documentary provides the spectator with unassailable admittance to what 'really happened'" (Kerner 2011: 11).

Memoria also uses witnesses to provide the viewer with access to the darkest sites of memory on Italian soil. The accounts of life in familial locations in Rome, Venice, Florence and other cities are turned into accounts of pain and persecution when the survivors share the story of their arrest and of their detention in view of deportation to Auschwitz II-Birkenau and other camps. These locations include Regina Coeli prison in the Rome borough of Trastevere, where Jews were taken before being deported and where Raimondo Di Neris, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in May 1944, gives an account of his arrest in Piazza Cavour. In one of the Regina Coeli's cells Romeo Rubino Salmoni reads a letter he wrote to his mother in 1944. In Florence, Nedo Fiano gives an account of his imprisonment in the Murate prison.⁵ Similarly, Liliana Segre visits the San Vittore prison in Milan, and recalls her arrest and that of her father, and later continues her testimony while standing in the underground section of Milan's Central Station, the aforementioned place from which the Jews were deported. Matilde Beniacar and Dora Venezia, two survivors who were deported to Auschwitz in February and June 1944 respectively, are interviewed in their homes as they recall their time at the Fossoli internment camp near Carpi (Modena), and their testimonies are located on this site of memory by means of the juxtaposition of their voices to a long tracking shot filmed from a car looking at the surviving barracks. Here, Gabbai uses a narrative device which is reminiscent of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), the milestone Holocaust documentary where Szymon Srebrnik is the only survivor who is persuaded to return to Poland, and specifically to the site of the killing centre in Chełmno (Fig. 2), while all other interviews are taken in distant locations.



Fig. 2: Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Chełmno, Poland (photograph by Maurizio Cinquegrani 2018)

Nevertheless, as Gary Weissman suggests, all testimonies in *Shoah* are located on the sites of the death camps "through the use of voice-over narration and images of present-day sites which, through skilful editing, are made to coincide with the events being narrated" (Weissman 2004: 192). Similarly, Beniacar and Venezia's testimonies are located in Fossoli by means of editing and voice-over narration; *Memoria* thus exhumes a site of memory and reveals the existence of invisible bonds tying together the quotidian places visited in the first part of the film, the local sites of persecution and, as we shall soon see, places associated with the destruction of individuals, groups and identities.

The interviews recorded in Italy anticipate the second part of *Memoria*, which is largely filmed in Auschwitz, the location where the process of dehumanisation described by Primo Levi in the poem that opens the film unfolded. The testimonies of the Italian Jews interviewed by Gabbai are either physically located in Auschwitz II-Birkenau during return journeys to the site of the annihilation of their families or, through the use of voice-over narration coinciding with images of present-day

sites, they are recorded remotely and made to match the locations of the events.⁶ Here each survivor interviewed by Gabbai, like Nora's *new historian*, is "no longer a memory-individual but, in himself, a *lieu de memoire*" or that type of spokesman of the past "who prevents history from becoming merely history" (Nora 1989: 18).

The name of Auschwitz has commonly been used as a term standing for the entirety of the Holocaust, whereas more specifically it stands for a network of labour and death camps established by the Nazis in the town of Oświęcim, in Małopolska, and its environs. Liberated by the Red Army in the winter of 1945, this metropolis of death included forty-five satellite camps and the three large camps Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, and Auschwitz III-Monowitz.⁷ Auschwitz II-Birkenau, with its four main crematoria, is the site where most of the Italian victims of the Holocaust were murdered. On this location, the survivors interviewed in *Memoria* interact with what Tim Cole has described as "a series of interconnected micro-sites rather than a homogenous memorial landscape" and enact a "dynamic relationship between landscape and memory" (Cole 2013: 102). Cole has also observed that Birkenau was architecturally subdivided into separate sections and thus "survivors had geographically limited experiences of the camp" (2013: 113). The micro-sites included in *Memoria* include the selection ramp, the surviving wooden barracks in the former Quarantine Block, the brick barracks in the former women's section, the main gate and watchtower, the Kanada warehouse facilities for the belongings of the victims, the ruins of the four crematoria, the site of the extermination pits and the pyres in the silver birch forest. The locations of *Memoria* thus correspond to Cole's categorisation of the material and symbolic landscape of Birkenau in relation to three main groups of sites: the ruins of the gas chambers and crematoria, which are visited for the first time by the survivors and which belong to the dead, and not to those who left the camp alive; the barracks, which are bound to the experience of the survivors and to their personal Holocaust histories; the gateways and other formerly Nazi-controlled places where survivors re-enact their original arrival and departure from the camp (Cole 2013: 104).

The journeys of the Italian survivors to Auschwitz II-Birkenau exemplify two main narratives of return: on the one hand site-specific memories emerge from the renewed experience of spaces lived by the survivors during their imprisonment while, on the other hand, the process of mourning is anchored to locations that did not belong to the survivors' direct experiences of the camp. As Tim Cole suggests, Birkenau is "experienced by survivors as more than simply a passive landscape that is visited to enact a series of rituals of mourning, guiding and revenge", and those who return to the ramp and the barracks of Birkenau "perform their testimony and reinhabit these places with their authoritative stories" (Cole 2013: 121, 112). Accordingly, as the testimonies gathered in *Memoria* combine the different temporalities embodied in its locations and in the memories they exhume, the film articulates an experience of return where Birkenau is not simply a place but rather, as Griselda Pollock suggests, an event that "signifies an encounter with death, and as such signifies a stupefying absence, the destroyed millions who signified furthermore, the destruction of one of the civilizations of Europe" (Pollock 2003: 176).



Fig. 3: Unloading and selection ramp in Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Poland (photograph by Maurizio Cinquegrani 2018)

The unloading and selection ramp is framed in *Memoria* as the most evocative space within the camp (Fig. 3). Various scenes present survivors Alessandro Kroo, Settimia Spizzichino, Nedo Fiano, Romeo Rubino Salmoni and Liliana Segre walking by the tracks outside the main gate and their continuation inside the perimeter of Birkenau. Here, they tell the infamous story of the selection process and they remember seeing their loved-ones for the last time. While the visit to this site of memory facilitates the process of the transmission of knowledge, survivors also appear to be affected by the spatial disorientation dictated by the changes to the built environment of the camp and what Cole (2013: 121) calls a sensory type of disorientation defined by the disappearance of the terrible smell of human flesh being burnt in the pyres lingering in the memories of the survivors and by the silence which has replaced the loud orders shouted by the men of the SS and the Kapos. This disorientation emerges in most of this testimonies and is particularly well captured by survivor Luigi Saggi who, as he stands near Crematorium IV, observes that there are now birds chirping in the trees and the ground is covered in grass. No birds nor grass are part of his memories of Birkenau. Similarly, Elisa Springer, a writer and survivors who was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944, remembers that the birch trees near Crematorium IV at the western end of the camp only appeared in the distance from her barrack and that walking towards them on her return to Auschwitz is a disorienting experience. The profound alteration of certain aspects of the past, according to Gary Weissman, complicates the experience of visiting Birkenau on account of "the post-war museumification of the site, the deterioration of what has been preserved, and the absence of the horrific past reality that, on some level, one anticipates encountering there" (Weissman 2004: 173). In the following sequences of *Memoria*, intertwined with aerial views of the camp and archival images of its buildings, nocturnal and eerie images of Birkenau filmed with a hand-held camera moving towards the brick barracks of the former women's section of the camp can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between the memories of the survivors and present-day disorientation, and accompany the testimonies of Goti Herskovits Bauer, Alberto Sed, Dora Klein, Ida Marcheria and Liliana Segre, as they remember the first night in the camp and the terrifying sight of the fires from the crematoria.

Other testimonies articulating a complex interaction between agents and sites of memory in their disorienting mutability are provided by Sabatino Finzi, Leone Sabatello, Alberto Mieli, Dora Klein

and, in particular, Shlomo Venezia, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in March 1944. Venezia was a member of the Sonderkommando and in *Memoria* he is interviewed as he walks on the perimeter of the ruins of Crematorium II and remembers the encounter with a cousin on his way to the gas chamber, in a testimony that evokes Abraham Bomba's famous testimony in *Shoah*, the account of his time as a barber in Treblinka and the encounter with his neighbours from Częstochowa in the gas chamber. Similarly, Nedo Fiano remembers his murdered family with voice-over narration juxtaposed to a tilting shot of the survivor walking on the track from the entrance of the camp towards the crematoria. He then stands on the ruins of the crematorium and talks about this location as the family's grave. As Fiano acts as a social actor performing his testimony, the mosaic of memories gathered in the film assembles a narrative of an event whose totality, as the dominant Holocaust historiography suggests, is beyond reach. Linda Williams, for example, has argued that *Shoah* has shown that the truth of the Holocaust exists only as a collection of fragments and not as a totalizing narrative (Williams 1991: 18). Accordingly, *Memoria* is a site-specific cinematic inquiry aimed at unlocking spatially-defined fragments of memory in that perpetually present experience of the past which, as Lanzmann's film makes explicit, defines any attempt to bear witness of the Holocaust. Like Fiano, other survivors interviewed in *Memoria* returned to Italy after the liberation of the camps and after an exhausting long journey across the devastated landscapes of post-war Europe; their individual memories expose the nature of the Holocaust as that mosaic of non-totalizing testimonies evoked by Lanzmann. Among those who left Auschwitz and returned to Italy with their testimony was also Primo Levi.

Return Journey

In February 1944 Primo Levi was deported to Auschwitz III-Monowitz where he was forced to work for the Nazis for eleven months, until the Red Army liberated the camps in following year. On 25 April 1983, the Italian public television company RAI broadcast an interview with Levi filmed on board of a coach which was taking him back to Auschwitz for a visit. On this occasion, Levi gave an account of his deportation and experience in Monowitz and, as he observes the Polish countryside from the window, he reflected upon the ways in which the past is still inscribed in present landscapes. Ferrario's documentary *La Strada di Levi* illustrates this idea by juxtaposing Levi's writing to present-day images of the places where he was taken after the liberation of Monowitz in the attempt to make his way back to his hometown Turin. After the war Levi spent time in various displaced persons camps and other locations following an itinerary including Kraków, Katowice, Tarnów, Rzeszów and Przemyśl (Poland), Lviv, Ternopil, Proskuriv (previously Proskurov, now Khmelnytskyi), Koziatyn and Zhmerynka (Ukraine), Slutsk, Staryya Darohi in Belarus (previously Starye Dorogi), and eventually travelled by train through Moldavia, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria and Germany, and arrived in Turin on 19 October 1945. The locations of *La Strada di Levi* enact a relation to the immediate post-war era which signals a fracture from the past, while highlighting the sameness of place and juggling with what Nora has called "illumination of discontinuity" and "retrospective continuity" (1989: 16). Like *Memoria*, Ferrario's film thus illustrates the process of recollection investigated by Nora and his reading of historical events which shifts "from the idea of a visible past to an invisible one, from a solid and steady past to our fractured past; from a history sought in the continuity of memory to a memory cast in the discontinuity of history" (1989: 17).

Based on Levi's memoir *La Tregua* and including extracts from *If this is a Man* and other writing, *La Strada di Levi* follows the itinerary of Levi's eight-month journey across Europe. This documentary opens with a sequence filmed on the site of Levi's arrival to Auschwitz, the original "Judenrampe" – the so-called "Jewish platform" located between the main railway station and Auschwitz II-Birkenau where the Jews would disembark until the opening of the extension of the railway tracks into Birkenau in spring 1944. A panning shot of the Kartoffellagerhallen, a series of brick buildings constructed by prisoners in 1942 for the storage of potatoes and cabbage, is accompanied by a voice-over narration reading from *If This is a Man*. These shots are followed by archival images filmed in 1984 and show Primo Levi during his visit to Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Present-day images of the camps filmed during a snowy day in winter 2005, including footage of

the ceremony for the 60th anniversary of the liberation, are accompanied by a voice-over narration reading an account of the liberation of the camps from Levi's *The Truce*.

La Strada di Levi leaves Auschwitz behind and moves on to follow Levi's journey along a route including locations which are not always conventionally associated with the unfolding of the genocide in Eastern Europe. And yet, these sites of memory belong to the experience of the Holocaust as it evolved in the post-war days, months and years to become an ongoing phenomenon requiring continuous adjustments. The memories embodied on these sites thus speak both of the Holocaust and of other events and historical phenomena inscribed in their buildings, their streets and other public spaces. As such, the memories excavated in *La Strada di Levi* evolve in multiple directions in a way which resembles the processes of multidirectional memory envisaged by Michael Rothberg, who argued that Holocaust memory can be situated in unexpected contexts enabling the articulation of other histories of victimization which can emerge thanks to post-war events that apparently have little to do with it (Rothberg 2009: 6-7).

In *La Strada di Levi*, the suffering of Eastern European peoples during the Soviet occupation, and more recently as a result of the processes of deindustrialisation dictated by neo-liberalism, emerges from a journey that is ultimately about the memory of the Holocaust embodied in the writing of Primo Levi. The sequences filmed in Katowice and Kraków illustrate this process well. After the liberation of Auschwitz and his recovery from an illness, Levi began his journey back to Turin by reaching barracks occupied by Italian soldiers in Kraków and then a camp for displaced people in the Bogucice district of Katowice. *La Strada di Levi* visits these locations and introduces the derelict industrial landscape of Bogucice in a sequence that speaks of a pocket of economic and social neglect, where work is no longer available and where high unemployment has led to mass migration. The following sequence takes the viewer to the Nowa Huta district in Kraków and includes present-day images of the area combined with archival footage from the 1940s depicting construction work in the neighbourhood. This footage is taken from *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*), a 1976 fiction film directed by Andrzej Wajda and focusing on a Polish bricklayer and a young filmmaker who is making a film on the worker. Wajda's film is a subtle attack on the corruption of the socialist regime and, in *La Strada di Levi*, is juxtaposed to the present-day urban and industrial landscape of Nowa Huta, including shots of the local branch of Deutsche Bank, the Church of Our Lady of Częstochowa, Ronald Reagan Square, and John Paul II Avenue – symbols of the post-1989 rejection of socialism. The visit to Nowa Huta continues to Tadeusz Sendzimir Steelworks, a plant which employed over 40,000 workers in its heyday in the 1970s, and now survived with the reduced number of 8,000 workers. The district has had to face high unemployment and mass migration as a consequence of its partial deindustrialisation. Nowa Huta is now a popular destination for tourists who are taken on board of communist era vehicles, the Trabant 601-S, with the promises of 'experiencing' the lost world of communism. Tours of Nowa Huta are reminiscent of the phenomenon of Holocaust Tourism in the older districts of Kraków Kazimierz and Podgórze, a reflection of the broader context of the present-day popularisation of the Holocaust in media and popular culture. As Andreas Huyssen has argued, the problem for Holocaust memory "is not forgetting, but rather the ubiquitousness, the excess of Holocaust imagery everywhere in our culture", including "the fascination with fascism in film and fiction" (Huyssen 1993: 256). Similarly, a fascination with the communist era has resulted in the transformation of sites associated with it, including Nowa Huta, into touristic experiences that are often deprived of an understanding of these locations as sites of ongoing struggle and contestation.

Archival footage from the days which followed the end of the war and including the celebrations which accompanied the arrival of the Red Army to Katowice is juxtaposed to Levi's description of his departure from Katowice in the direction of Lwów, a city which was soon going to become a part of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic under the name of Lviv (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Lviv, Ukraine (photograph by Maurizio Cinquegrani 2018)

In June 1945 Levi spent a rainy night under the shelter of an underground passage at the Lviv-Holovnyi Railway Station, from which thousands of Jews were deported to Siberia during the Soviet occupation in 1940. In the following year, when the Nazis occupied the city on 29 June 1941, approximately 100,000 Jews still lived in Lviv. The month of November saw the first large-scale murder operation in the city and the establishment of a Jewish residential quarter which was to become the ghetto. Between the summer of 1942 and the autumn of 1943, the almost entire Jewish population of the city was exterminated by means of murder operations and deportations to the death camps in Sobibór and Bełżec and to the Janowska concentration camp, on the outskirts of the city (Miron 2010: 437-443). Lviv emerges from the documentary as a contested site that has seen the persecution of Poles, Jews and Ukrainians in different waves and that in recent years is still harbouring a conflict between Russians and Ukrainians. *La Strada di Levi* illustrates this struggling identity and includes present-day footage of the city followed by archival footage filmed in Lviv in May 2000 and showing the commemoration of Ihor Bilozir, a popular Ukrainian composer and songwriter who was beaten to death by two Russian men for singing Ukrainian songs in a public café in Lviv. Ferrario interviews Bilozir's wife Oksana Bilozir, an artist who served as Minister of Culture and Tourism of Ukraine in 2005 and who provides an account of the difficulties with the Soviet regime encountered by her husband during his career. This vision of a contested space embodying the memories of different groups challenges assumptions on the idea of collective memory as a useful framework of historical analysis and understanding, and hints to the multidirectional quality of memory articulated by Rothberg:

Fundamental to the conception of competitive memory is a notion of the public sphere as a pre-given, limited space in which already-established groups engage in a life-and-death struggle. In contrast, pursuing memory's multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established *positions* but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction. Equally fundamental to the conception of competitive memory is the notion that the boundaries of memory parallel boundaries of group identity (Rothberg 2009: 5).

In Lviv memory and group identity are two conceptions which are intrinsically related and where the past can only come into being by a dialogical interaction between groups with diverse experience of

the city. *La Strada di Levi* articulates the necessity of a continual reconstruction of subjects and spaces by juxtaposing Levi's experience of Lviv, which also talks of the fate of the Jews of that city during the war, to an urgent present-day conflict unravelling in Ukraine.

The journey in time and space continues to the railway transportation hub Zhmerynka, from which Levi was expecting to go to Odesa and eventually back to Italy and where Ferrario visits the railway station in which Levi and his fellow travellers stayed for three days. The writer was instead taken to Belarus and, after a train journey followed by a ride in a horse cart, he arrived in the town of Staryya Darohi. From 15th July to 15th September 1945, Levi stayed at "Krasny Dom" (the Red House) a displaced persons camp on the outskirts of the town, where he lived with 1,400 displaced persons from Europe and worked as a medical assistant. Levi's account of his time in Staryya Darohi is here juxtaposed to present-day images of the countryside near the town. The writer left Staryya Darohi on 15th September and returned to Ukraine. This leg of the journey, followed by Ferrario in *La Strada di Levi*, included the vicinity of the Prypyat (Pripiat') River, the area where the city of Prypyat (Fig. 5) and the Chornobyl (Chernobyl) Nuclear Power Plant would have been built in the 1970s.



Fig. 5: Sports Hall, Middle School 3, Prypyat, Ukraine (photograph by Maurizio Cinquegrani 2018)

Archival images of the evacuation of the men, women and children of Prypyat after the 1986 nuclear disaster at the power plant are juxtaposed to eerie images of the present-day derelict buildings of the city, and evokes images of other, more violent, deportations which affected the region during the war. Archival photographs and footage of the power plant filmed soon after the incident are accompanied by Levi's reflection on the irrational, disorderly forces which appear to rule the world. The juxtaposition of Levi's words to the images of the site of the disaster of Chornobyl ignites a mnemonic parallel between the Holocaust and the fear of a nuclear war, and thus a "productive, intercultural dynamic" which illustrates what Rothberg has described as a process subject to "ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" and as an "interaction of different historical memories" (Rothberg 1996: 3). Similarly, as *La Strada di Levi* follows the final phase of the writer's return journey to Turin, the economic crisis affecting the Moldovan and Romanian villages visited by Ferrario as well as the far-right demonstrations witnessed in Munich talk of a multidirectional reading of memory where specific sites embody multiple histories, continued negotiations, and multiple interactions, and thus illustrate Rothberg's idea that "the borders of memory and identity are jagged; what looks at first like my own property often turns out

to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant" (Rothberg 2009: 5).

One of the final sequences of *La Strada di Levi* is filmed at the Altopiano di Asiago, or the Asiago Plateau. Mario Rigoni Stern – the author of *Il sergente nella neve* (1953), a memoir which draws on his experience as a sergeant major in the Alpini corps during the Italian retreat from Russia in 1943 – reads a letter he wrote to his friend Primo Levi. Stern's writing evokes the time when he invited Levi to spend the Christmas with him in Asiago, but Levi decided not to join Stern on that occasion. And yet, the connection between Levi and Stern, their experiences during the war, their writing and their testimonies establish Asiago as site of memory which embodies in its landscape multiple memories of destruction and reconstruction. The Altopiano di Asiago was one of the battlefields of the Italian wars of independence against the Austrian empire in the nineteenth century, and again during the First World War when thousands of soldiers were killed in June 1917 as the Italian and Austro-Hungarian armies fought for possession of Mount Ortigara. In 1945 the small town of Pedescala, near Asiago, saw one of the most infamous massacres of civilians at the hands of the Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS and Italian fascists. In *Amore di Confine* (1986), a collection of short stories about the war, Stern informs the reader that Asiago had already been burnt to the ground by Sigismund, the Archduke of Austria, in 1446 and again by the Austrian artillery in 1916: "Era un paese di montagna, dico era perché nel 1916 la guerra lo ha prima incendiato e poi distrutto e raso al suolo; e anche se tra il 1919 e il 1922 è stato ricostruito, ora non è più quello" ["Asiago was a mountain village; I say it was because in 1916 the war destroyed it and burnt it to the ground; it was rebuilt between 1919 and 1922, but it is no longer the same place." (trans. by the author)] (Stern 1986: 6). And yet, despite physical disfigurement and discontinuity, Asiago still is the same site, and so are Birkenau, Bogucice, Nowa Huta, Lviv and Staryya Darohi, as well as – notwithstanding their continuity and immutability – the streets of Rome, Florence and the calli of Venice where the survivors interviewed in *Memoria* remember and unlock their past, and so is the track below platform 21 at Milan Central Station, where the journey illustrated in this article began. While these locations might no longer be real environments of collective memory they can be thought of as sites of multidirectional memory; they can be read by means of retrospective continuity or as locations that embody multiple memories going backwards, forward, borrowing and adapting one another, disappearing and then reemerging in the warmth of recollection, in the unbearable experience of trauma.

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Notes

¹ Italian documentaries based on archival material and survivors' testimonies recorded in the country include *Volevo solo vivere* (*I Only Wanted to Live*, Mimmo Calopresti, 2006), *I Ragazzi di Villa Emma: Giovani Ebrei in Fuga* (Aldo Zappalà, 2008), *La Deportazione Genovese: Racconti e Testimonianze* (*Deportations from Genoa: Tales and Testimonies*, Primo Giroldini, 2009), *Il viaggio più lungo* (*The Longest Journey*, Ruggero Gabbai, 2013), *Meditate che questo è stato* (*Never Forget That This Has Happened*, Pietro Suber, 2015), and *Tutto davanti a questi occhi* (*All in Front of These Eyes*, Walter Veltroni, 2018).

² Primo Levi, 1963. *La Tregua* [The Truce], Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore.

³ Pierre Nora, 1996. "Preface to English Language Edition: From Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory", in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Pierre Nora, New York: Columbia University Press.

⁴ Primo Levi, 1996. *Survival in Auschwitz. If This is a Man*, New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 11 (first published in Italian as *Se questo è un uomo* in 1947 by Biblioteca Leone Ginzburg).

⁵ A similar account is given by Alessandro Kroo, a survivor who was taken to Auschwitz in February 1944.

⁶ In *Memoria*, survivors are also interviewed in the private spaces of their home, and those who tell their stories include Piero Terracina, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in May 1944 and who recalls the racial laws and is interviewed

in his studio in Rome; Dora Venezia also recalls the racial laws as she is interviewed in her home; Sabatino Finzi, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in October 1943, is interviewed in his home in Rome and gives his account of the first deportations. This interview continues on the street, outside Finzi's old address in Via del Tempio 4, where he remembers the Nazis and their Italian collaborators storming the building and several other dwellings in Via della Reginella. Specific locations beyond the larger Italian cities are filmed, for example, to accompany the testimony given by Goti Herskovits Bauer, a survivor who was deported to Auschwitz in May 1944, who recalls her failed attempt to escape in Switzerland in the course of an interview given on location in the town of Cremona at the Italian-Swiss border.

⁷ Auschwitz I had been converted from pre-war military barracks and is associated with the imprisonment and murder of a heterogeneous group of prisoners mainly composed of Poles and also including a significant number of Jews. Birkenau was a vast purpose-built concentration and extermination complex. Monowitz was the labour camp attached to a IG Farben factory where Primo Levi was imprisoned. The only sequence of *Memoria* filmed in Auschwitz I represents a visit to Block 10 where Settimia Spizzichino, who returns to the site, survived medical experiments.

Bio

Maurizio Cinquegrani is a Senior Lecturer in Film at the University of Kent. He lives in London, the city whose cinematic image he discusses at great length in his first book, *Of Empire and the City: Remapping Early British Cinema* (Peter Lang, 2014). *Journey to Poland: Documentary Landscapes of the Holocaust* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018) is his second monograph and it has followed a number of articles and book chapters on the subject of film and the Holocaust. Maurizio's work on this topic has been inspired by his numerous journeys to Eastern Europe.

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Suggested Citation

Cinquegrani, Maurizio. 2018. "Multidirectional Sites of Memory in Italian Holocaust Documentaries." *Ghetto Films and their Afterlife* (ed. by Natascha Drubek). Special Double Issue of *Apparatus. Film, Media and Digital Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe* 2-3. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17892/app.2016.0003.132>

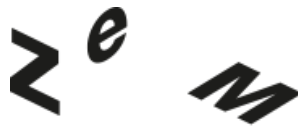
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Apparatus. ISSN 2365-7758