

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cinematic remediations and the Allied occupation of Naples: experiments in cultural memory

Ruth Glynn 

Department of Italian, University of Bristol, UK
Email: r.s.glynn@bristol.ac.uk

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Abstract

This article addresses cinematic remediations of literary works treating the Allied occupation of Naples: Liliana Cavani's *La pelle* (1981) and Francesco Patierno's *Naples'44* (2016). Taking a memory studies approach, it surveys the corpus of cultural representations of the occupation and asks what the remediations studied contribute to the Italian cultural memory of the occupation. Analysis focuses on the diverse strategies deployed by the films to reshape the cultural memory of the occupation for their respective audiences. I argue that where Cavani's remediation seeks to construct a feminist counter-memory of the Allied occupation, Patierno's film betrays a contradictory impulse to both revive and lay the cultural memory to rest. I close by asking how successful the two films are in becoming meaningful 'media of cultural memory' (Erll 2010, 390) and what that may tell us about the place of the Allied occupation in Italian cultural memory at distinct historical junctures.

Keywords: Allied occupation of Naples; *La pelle*; *Naples'44*; cultural memory; counter-memory

Introduction

Liliana Cavani's *La pelle* (1981) and Francesco Patierno's *Naples'44* (2017) are rare cinematic remediations of literary works addressing the Allied occupation of Naples. As remediations, these films overtly seek to intervene on and reshape the cultural memory of that experience and remind audiences of Naples's centrality to the history and memory of the Allied occupation of Italy. The films therefore complement scholarly attempts to retrieve this historical episode from the margins of public consciousness and to bring the occupation into dialogue with the wider history of Italy during and after the Second World War. Most recently, Keith Lowe (2024) has pushed for recognition that what happened in Naples under the Allied occupation was not incidental to more important events taking place further north, as it tends to be treated, but a harbinger for the compromises and corruption of ideals that would occur throughout Italy after the Allies took hold. Be that as it may, Lowe's assertion that 'the Neapolitan story is the Italian story' presents a formidable challenge to received knowledge (2024, 6). It runs counter to the dominant narrative of self-determination and freedom from foreign domination underpinning the foundation of the Italian Republic in 1946 and the reconstruction of Italian national identity in the postwar period. That dominant, state-sponsored narrative implicitly excluded the experience of the Allied occupation from the discursive boundaries of the newly constituted nation (Glynn 2017) and marginalised it

within the wealth of historical writings and cultural memories addressing the Second World War.

The marginalisation of the Allied occupation in historiography and cultural memory has resulted in a somewhat distorted understanding of the experience. Initially conceptualised in terms of 'liberation', the presence of the Allied forces in Naples in 1943–4 has only gradually come to be understood as 'replac[ing] one military occupation with another' (Gatt-Rutter 1997, 78). As the first major city in western Europe to be 'liberated' by the Allied forces and as the headquarters of the American Fifth Army between October 1943 and May 1944, Naples proved to be an important laboratory for Allied military governance. This was characterised by the imbalance of power generated by Italy's transition from an enemy power to a 'co-belligerent'; by the inexperience and failings of the Allied administration – condemned by a veteran of the experience as 'military government, let it be hoped, at its worst' (Fisher 1950, 122) – and by the equivocal status of the occupation itself (see Ellwood 1985; 2012, 279–287; De Marco 1996). At the social level, the Allied occupation transformed Naples into a melting pot of races, languages and cultures, as the city played host to an extraordinary encounter between the nascent post-fascist Italian society and the international troops of the Allied forces. Despite the breadth of the international presence, the encounter has been simplified in the Italian cultural memory and depicted as an encounter between the Neapolitan population, emerging from Fascism, war and starvation, and the consumerist practices and capitalist culture of the USA. This discrepancy likely originates in the superior spending power of the US soldiers relative to other Allied personnel (see De Marco 1996).

In this article, I revisit Liliana Cavani's *La pelle* (1981), taking a cultural memory studies approach, and bring it into dialogue with Francesco Patierno's *Naples'44* (2016).¹ My focus on cultural memory departs from existing studies of cultural representations of the occupation, which critique the construction of occupied Naples as an exceptional, amoral and dysfunctional society (Gatt-Rutter 1997) and/or explore the feminisation of Italy in the aftermath of the country's capitulation to the Allies (Wagstaff 1997; Glynn 2015; 2017; Escolar 2019). Though gender remains important here, cultural memory studies take precedence as a complementary and increasingly pertinent lens through which to consider the relationship between the selected films and the wider cultural corpus.² I open with a survey of that corpus before proceeding to interrogate the diverse strategies deployed by the films to reshape the cultural memory of the occupation at distinct historical junctures. I argue that where Cavani's remediation seeks to construct a feminist counter-memory of the Allied occupation, Patierno's film betrays a contradictory impulse to both revive and lay the cultural memory to rest. I close by asking how successful the two films are in becoming meaningful 'media of cultural memory' (Erl 2010, 390) and what the response to that question tells us about the place of the Allied occupation in Italian cultural memory at different moments in time.

The Allied occupation of Naples in cultural memory

The Allied occupation of Naples has generated a wealth of official and unofficial documentation, visual and oral histories, memoirs and other cultural works, ranging across photography, popular song, literary production, documentaries, and feature films. Together, these works constitute a substantial corpus of historical and cultural value, which stands in sharp contrast to the relative scarcity of academic analyses.³ However, although the sources are many and varied, a few key works, produced exclusively by men and for the most part in the immediate aftermath of the war, dominate the cultural imaginary of the Allied occupation of Naples. Of the *Italian* corpus that is the focus of this article, four works produced during the 1940s are notably prominent in the public sphere and continue to shape the

Italian cultural imaginary of Allied-occupied Naples.⁴ These are Eduardo Nicolardi's popular song 'Tammuriata nera' (1944); the Naples episode of Roberto Rossellini's film *Paisà* (1946); Curzio Malaparte's literary epic *La pelle* (1949) and, above all, Eduardo de Filippo's *Napoli milionaria!* (1945; 1952; 1966).⁵ Together, these works encapsulate the major thematic concerns of the occupation in the Italian cultural imaginary (see Gribaudi 1997, 297–298): the appalling hunger, poverty, disease and desperation experienced by Neapolitans in the war-ravaged city. They also convey the psychological unease surrounding the proliferation of theft, black market racketeering, sexual licentiousness, and prostitution, amid rampant inflation and the abundant spending power of the US forces.

As the living memory of the occupation has faded, 'Tammuriata nera', *Napoli milionaria!*, *Paisà* and *La pelle* have become ever more central to the cultural memory of the encounter between Neapolitans and Allies. Viewed through the theoretical apparatus of cultural memory studies, these works represent what Aleida Assman would term the 'canon' of Italian cultural memory addressing the occupation of Naples. For Assmann (2010, 100), the canon represents the active dimension of cultural memory built on a small number of 'normative and formative texts, places, persons, artifacts, and myths' that are actively circulated and communicated to keep the past present. In contrast to the inert 'archive' or storeroom of cultural relics that are potentially available to memory but not actively interpreted, the 'canon' is understood to be 'charged with the highest meaning and value', containing cultural messages that are addressed to posterity and that reproduce, recycle, and reaffirm the cultural capital of a given society (A. Assman 2010, 99).

Among the prominent messages communicated by the canon of cultural memory surrounding the Allied occupation is the construction of occupied Naples as a 'contact zone' in the terms outlined by Mary Louise Pratt: a social space 'where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of power' (Pratt 1991, 34). In applying Pratt's theorisation to occupied Naples, I do not mean to equate the Allied occupation with the colonialism of Latin America studied by Pratt but to recognise the relevance of Pratt's discussion to cultural representations of the occupation. For not only does occupied Naples exhibit some of the inequalities and cultural misunderstandings of the colonial contact zone; it is also permeated by similar 'autoethnographic' practices, in which oppressed persons or groups 'undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them' (Pratt 1991, 35).

In the case of Allied-occupied Naples, such views and understandings include not only those generated by Allied personnel on their encounter with the city and its inhabitants but also the wider historical repertoire of discourses that posit Naples and the Italian south as other to a national and European norm (see Moe 2002; Carruthers 2016, 39–49; Glynn 2021; Lowe 2024, 146–157). A second prominent aspect of the canon is the construction of the Allied occupation and its consequences as an aberration – a temporary disruption to established social and moral order. In this respect, the Allied occupation of Naples occupies a similar position to Fascism in the postwar period: injurious to the discourse of 'good Italians' that would be so central to restoring Italian dignity in the aftermath of Fascism (see Fogu 2006; Patriarca 2010), it tends to be bracketed off in mainstream understandings of Italian identity and history. But perhaps the most important cultural message conveyed by the 'canon' of cultural memory is the deep sense of shame associated with the deleterious moral effects of the Allied occupation on the Neapolitan people.⁶ This is tightly interwoven with the feminisation of Naples in the cultural canon and the prominent attention afforded the bodies of Neapolitan women. The emphasis on the corporeal effects of the occupation communicates the intimacy of the encounter between cultures in the 'contact zone' of the occupied city while adhering to – and perhaps deriving its canonical power from – a longer tradition of representation in which gendered corporeal metaphors signal Naples's divergence from the mainstream of Italian national modernity (Glynn 2019, 262–263).

It is an established principle of cultural memory studies that ‘collective memory is constantly “in the works”’ (Rigney 2010, 345). That is to say, the canon of cultural memory is not fixed but open to alteration, in accordance with the fluctuating concerns of an evolving society (A. Assman 2010, 104). It has also been recognised, however, that cultural memories ‘tend to converge and coalesce’ over time (Rigney 2005, 18) and that ‘consensus ... is ultimately the road to amnesia’ (Rigney 2010, 346). On that view, the fact that the canon of cultural memory pertaining to the Allied occupation of Naples has remained remarkably impervious to change since the 1940s – unlike, say, the memory of the Holocaust or antifascist Resistance – suggests a certain societal indifference towards that experience that is perhaps symptomatic of the marginalised position of the occupation in Italian cultural memory.

Yet, despite that, the canon of cultural memory of the Allied occupation of Naples has not gone unchallenged since the 1940s. Rather, all subsequent cultural products treating the occupation – literary works (and their translations), films, oral histories – engage in implicit if not explicit dialogue with the canon and, to different extents, seek to intervene on the cultural memory of the occupation. This is especially true of remediations, works borrowed or ‘repurposed’ from another medium and, in the process, subjected to ‘a necessary redefinition’ (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 45). As outlined above, this article addresses Liliana Cavani’s dramatic reconstruction of Curzio Malaparte’s *La pelle* alongside Francesco Patierno’s 2016 documentary reworking of *Naples’44* (1978), a military memoir by the British travel writer and novelist Norman Lewis. As rare remediations of ‘canonical’ works of cultural memory within their respective contexts, these films overtly seek to revitalise and reshape the memory of the Allied occupation of Naples and represent significant interventions in the existing canon of Italian cultural memory. Cavani’s *La pelle* presents a feminist provocation that exposes and challenges the androcentric focus of the canon, resists the official version of truth classified as ‘history’, and produces a radically new understanding that amounts to a ‘counter-memory’ (Foucault 1977, 160) of the Allied occupation. Patierno’s *Naples’44* takes a radically different approach; it incorporates into the cinematic corpus Lewis’s British perspective and provides a retrospective, summative account that pays homage to the existing corpus of filmic representation but betrays a contradictory impulse to both renew the cultural memory of the occupation and lay that memory to rest. In their different ways, both texts shed light on the condition of the wider memory of the Allied occupation at distinct moments in time.

La pelle’s feminist provocation (1981)

Released in 1981, Liliana Cavani’s *La pelle* takes a rather free approach to Malaparte’s controversial and deeply disturbing literary portrayal of Allied-occupied Naples. Banned by the Catholic Church and widely denounced for bringing shame on Naples, Malaparte’s original presents a highly fictionalised account of the author’s experiences while serving as a liaison officer in the newly constituted Italian Liberation Corps attached to the US Fifth Army in Naples. Rich in literary and biblical allusion, the text combines fictional invention with recording of historical events to fulfil its testimonial mission to expose the abject degradation and the moral compromises visited on the Neapolitans in their desperate struggle to survive. The ‘complex psycho-social drama’ (Gatt-Rutter 1997, 61) deriving from that mission presents Naples as ‘host to all manner of corruption, excess, and transgression’ (Glynn 2017, 5). However, rather than condemning the Neapolitans for their moral failings, *La pelle* characterises such transgressions as exemplifications of the terrible consequences of the Allied ‘liberation’, overtly presented as an imperialist occupation and the origin of a moral plague afflicting the local population (see Glynn 2017, 5). Published while Italy was a

major beneficiary of Marshall Plan aid and intent on developing commercial relations with the US, *La pelle*'s construction of the 'liberation' was, inevitably, spurned by Italian authorities. However, the critical suspicion with which the book was greeted owed as much to Malaparte's renown for political inconstancy, especially in relation to Fascism, and to his divergence from the intellectual tendencies of postwar Italy (see Baldasso 2017; Martellini 1976).

Cavani's decision to adapt Malaparte's work was no more positively received; the film was viewed as a misguided departure from the erotic dynamics and aesthetic choices of the director's more recent work and criticised for its recuperation of an unreliable historical account (see Giardino 2011, 103). A French-Italian co-production based on a screenplay co-written by Cavani and Robert Katz, *La pelle* owed its generous budget and star-studded cast (including Marcello Mastroianni, Burt Lancaster and Claudia Cardinale) to the international success of Cavani's *Il portiere di notte* (1974). *La pelle* shares with that film an interest in the unsettling sexual, psychological, and power dynamics generated by war but departs from it in externalisation of its exploration and in its grand cinematic scope. As I observed elsewhere (Glynn 2015, 346–347), the film is faithful to Malaparte's original in its graphic exposé of the humiliations and compromises of the occupation, especially in the sexual realm. However, it is at pains to show 'the unspeakable degradation of the Neapolitans as being the counterpart to the unspeakable behaviour of the US and other Allied soldiery who are the Neapolitans' clients, circus-masters and exploiters, posing as benefactors' (Gatt-Rutter 1997, 61). In this way, Cavani's film works to counter widespread misapprehensions about the literary work and restore to cultural memory Malaparte's core message: that the moral 'plague' visited upon Naples originated with the Allies rather than the Neapolitans, and that any cause for shame lies with the 'liberators' rather than the local population. Though Cavani has consistently claimed to occupy a position uninflected by political ideology (see Marrone 2001, 6–7), her decision to adapt *La pelle* would appear to endorse Malaparte's interpretation of the Allied occupation as the economic and cultural subjugation of Italy; it thus broadly coincides with Italian leftist political hostility towards the USA (see Brogi 2016).

Where Cavani's film departs from Malaparte's original – and, indeed, from the broader representation of the occupation – is in placing women at the centre of the action by developing significant storylines for female characters only briefly mentioned in the literary text (Giardino 2011).⁷ As I have previously argued (Glynn 2015, 347), the film reflects the feminist turn of the 1970s and participates in the project of excavating and bringing to public attention the experiences of women in war. Significantly, Cavani's gynocentric remediation of *La pelle* eschews the historiographical focus on the minority of women who actively contributed to the partisan struggle in the centre-north of Italy (see Forgacs 1999, 191–192) and foregrounds instead the experiences of women throughout Italy who were subjected to the effects of war and occupation without participating in armed resistance. In the analysis that follows, I am indebted to two related elements of my earlier reading of *La pelle* (Glynn 2015): first, that, in its graphic depiction of the violence perpetrated by the Allied forces within the supposed 'safe zone' of the occupied city, Cavani's film presents the occupation as an extension of the militarised violence of war; and second, that in its use of narrative and visual comparison and metaphor, *La pelle* reconceptualises the Allied occupation of Naples as a form of rape. From a cultural memory perspective, Cavani's radical departure not only from Malaparte's understanding but from all existing political and cultural interpretations amounts to a feminist 'counter-memory' of the Allied occupation of Naples. I understand 'counter memory' in the terms outlined by Foucault: that is, as a challenge to hegemonic or official accounts and the creation of alternative histories, memories and narratives that mobilise the memories and struggles of marginalised or oppressed groups.

However, my understanding is also influenced by Verónica Tello's preference for a non-dialectical counter-memory, structured not as an *either/or* or *us/them* formula that sustains 'one history over another' but in accordance with an *and-and* formula that posits 'multiple histories being held together, or networked – *not without tension or difference*' (Tello 2022, 391).

Indeed, that '*and-and*' formula underpins Cavani's approach to Malaparte's literary original and the wider cultural memory of the Allied occupation of Naples. In challenging the androcentric bias of that memory, the film both endorses and complements the autoethnographic thrust of Malaparte's literary narration, a major structuring element of which is the 'systematic juxtaposition of Italians and Americans' (Gatt-Rutter 1997, 63) for the purpose of contesting misunderstandings of Neapolitan behaviour in the context of occupation. The cinematic challenge to the revulsion expressed by the American liberators and conquerors at the abjection of the local population centres on Captain Malaparte's interactions with two American characters: the unsophisticated young officer Jimmy Wren (Ken Marshall) and the rather more cultured female aviator Deborah Wyatt (Alexandra King). Where Malaparte's interactions with Jimmy centre on the commodification of female bodies in the occupied city, those with Deborah Wyatt focus on her seizure of the moral high ground and build to the deployment of rape as a metaphor for the occupation.

Unlike Malaparte's book, which opens *in medias res*, amid the babelic confusion of the occupied city, Cavani's film takes a more circuitous approach to provide historical context for the 1980s viewer and establish Malaparte's credibility as guide to Naples and interpreter of the occupation.⁸ When the viewer is finally confronted with images of Allied-occupied Naples, the city is presented as a carnivalesque playground of corporeal exhibition, visual pleasure and sexual adventure (see Marrone 2001; Brignoli 2011; Glynn 2015). A medium shot follows Malaparte and Jimmy as they descend a flight of stairs, passing uniformed or jellaba-clad Allied personnel surrounded by women flirting in English, raising their skirts or exposing their pudenda (Figure 1). Visually, the scene constructs the city as host to all manner of promiscuity and licentiousness. However, the accompanying dialogue offers opposing readings and presents an autoethnographic challenge to external understandings of Allied-occupied Naples. For Captain Malaparte, the corporeal exhibition is a product of the 'highly asymmetrical relations of power' operating in the contact zone that is the occupation (Pratt 1991, 34); he discusses it in relation to the falling 'price of human flesh' and implicitly construes it as part of degradation of human life arising from the military subjugation of Italians and from the market economy of the occupation. For Jimmy, instead, the corporeal exhibition amounts to an exhilarating 'initiation' (Brignoli 2011, 200); he describes it as a 'spectacle' and equates it to 'seeing Europe'. His inability to understand that the spectacle on display is not inherent to the culture but a product of the contact zone that is the occupation is amply demonstrated by his bemusement at Malaparte's discussion of the economic, racial and power dynamics at play.

As the film progresses, the carnivalesque quality of this introductory scene is replaced by a distinctly sobering understanding of the realities of the occupation, informed by increasingly explicit autoethnographic challenges to external misreadings – diegetic and pre-emptively extradiegetic – of life in the occupied city. Two scenes exemplify this approach. The first involves Deborah Wyatt, the arrogant American aviator whose relationship with Malaparte is constructed from the outset as adversarial and symbolic of the power dynamics between Italy and the USA. As part of a wider 'pattern of reciprocal acts of cruelty' (Glynn 2015, 350), Malaparte takes Wyatt to witness a back-street market in child prostitution. The American's horror at the sight of children being manhandled and led away by North African soldiers, as their mothers look on, conveys her obliviousness to the desperation of the local population and to the economic realities of the occupation, while also



Figure 1. 'Seeing Europe'. *La Pelle*, directed by Liliana Cavani, 1981.

evidencing her inability to correctly attribute the existence of a flourishing sex trade to the presence of the Allied forces. Rather than expressing outrage at the fate of the children (under Allied governance), her anger is directed towards Malaparte for making her witness the depravity: 'You are degenerates, Naples is degenerate. Why did you bring me here? ... We didn't want this war, we don't sell our bodies for a packet of cigarettes'.⁹ Thus, Wyatt confuses the conditions of the Allied-occupied city with what she sees as 'a moral degeneracy inherent to Naples and sets it against the superior moral code of American civilisation' (Glynn 2015, 350). By way of response, Malaparte – exemplifying the autoethnographic disposition emphasised by Pratt (1991) – provides a short lesson in the real-life economics of the occupation, demonstrating how much food a packet of cigarettes can buy and signalling the centrality of sex as a vehicle for survival. As previously noted (Glynn 2015, 351), the scene ends with a chastened Wyatt calling for the first of their truces, in words that will recur with great poignancy at a later stage: 'are we even?'.

The second episode follows Jimmy's discovery that, in a city rife with prostitution, the virginity of his beloved Maria Concetta – whose innocence and purity are symbolised by her simple white dress – has been commodified by her father, with scores of soldiers paying to see the intact hymen of the renowned 'Virgin of Naples'.¹⁰ Oblivious to his own part in the exploitative economy of the Allied occupation, the wounded Jimmy ends the enterprise by digitally penetrating the girl and angrily denounces Italians as 'filthy pigs', echoing Wyatt's condemnation of the North African soldiers in the previous scene. Malaparte's response amounts to a lesson in the economic and power disparities of the Allied occupation, and its sentimental and moral consequences. Just as he had chastised Wyatt, so too Malaparte berates Jimmy for failing to recognise the asymmetrical nature of his relationship with Maria Concetta ('You entered that house, convinced you could buy anything with chocolate and cigarettes'). He explicitly relates the commodification of her body to the occupation, which is construed as a consequence of Italy's defeat and an extension of the battlefield but



Figure 2. Deborah Wyatt. *La Pelle*, directed by Liliana Cavani, 1981.

with women and children most exposed: 'We lost the war. Women and children lost it most of all.' In thus foregrounding and elaborating on the literary original's cursory acknowledgement that 'women have lost the war too' (Malaparte 2013, 77), Cavani's remediation endorses the book's autoethnographic stance while simultaneously announcing its feminist challenge not only to Malaparte's androcentrism but also to that of the wider cultural memory of the Allied occupation of Naples.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, it is through the body of Deborah Wyatt that Cavani's feminist counter-memory of the occupation will be conveyed, in the final third of the film, when the American becomes the unlikely vehicle for the metaphorical construction of the Allied occupation of Naples as an act of rape. Wyatt's transformation from a uniformed representative of the US army to an elegantly dressed woman attending an exclusive dinner party exposes her to the gendered power dynamics of the occupied city (see Giardino 2012, 107; Glynn 2015, 352–353). Amid the chaos of bombardment and the simultaneous eruption of Vesuvius, Wyatt is separated from her party and finds herself alone at night on the streets of Naples (Figure 2). There, bereft of her uniform and military insignia, she loses the protection afforded her as representative of American military power and falls prey to the logic of occupation when she is picked up by a company of US soldiers who mistake her for a local woman and proceed to rape her.

The rape of Wyatt, though curiously overlooked in the early scholarship, has more recently been subject to diverse critical interpretations. For Giardino, reading the film in the light of a revival of fascism and militarism in the fashion and film of the late 1970s and 1980s, Wyatt's combination of faithful wife and uniformed officer evokes the spectre of the Fascist woman. The rape thus recalls 'the diegetic punishment that in Fascist movies would be commonly perpetrated upon prostitutes [or] sexualized women' (Giardino 2012, 107). However, it also serves a broader purpose insofar as it demonstrates 'the real condition of women in a patriarchal society', where 'female virtue and moral integrity are never innate' but contingent and capable of being revoked (Giardino 2012, 107). Where my own reading

departs from Giardino's is in viewing Wyatt's rape as exemplary of the fate of women in war and a metaphor for the treatment of Naples under the Allied Occupation. The latter is conveyed through the association forged between the rape and the series of antagonistic battles between Wyatt and Malaparte as spokespersons for their respective cultures and understandings of the occupation. Key to that association is Wyatt's reiteration of the phrase 'are we even?' when she re-encounters Malaparte in the aftermath of the rape. As I previously argued, the compassionate tone with which Malaparte replies, 'we're very even', is a clear endorsement of the position that the rape is a metaphor deployed to equate the treatment of Naples under the Allied occupation – indeed the occupation itself – with the gendered violence of rape (Glynn 2015, 353).

Extending beyond my previous assertion that Cavani's cinematic remediation of *La pelle* presents a radical challenge to the existing representations of the Allied occupation of Naples, I want to suggest that the film also seeks to construct a non-dialectical feminist counter-memory that recognises and incorporates the experiences of women and children alongside the existing focus on men in the canon of cultural memory. By rejecting Malaparte's literary construction of the occupation as a 'moral plague', carried by the Americans but affecting the locals (2013, 7–41), and by fore-fronting the violence and humiliations visited on women and children, Cavani's remediation highlighted the continuities between the battlefield and the supposed safety of the occupied city, and reconceptualised the occupation as an act of rape. In so doing, *La pelle* talked back, in autoethnographic vein, not only to the representations that others have made of Naples in this period but also to the androcentrism of Malaparte's work and of the wider canon of Italian cultural memory.

The non-dialectical quality of the counter-memory envisaged by Cavani is neatly illustrated by the epilogue to the film, which centres on the male body and takes the viewer beyond the Neapolitan context to the outskirts of Rome. The Roman setting pre-emptively Lowe's thesis that what happens in Allied-occupied Naples is a harbinger for what will happen elsewhere in Italy after the Allies take hold (2024, 6). Here, following the breakthrough at Monte Cassino, the US Fifth Army is preparing to liberate the city from Nazi occupation. As the local population welcomes the American 'liberators', a man holding up a child, waving an American flag, and shouting 'long live the Americans!' is mercilessly crushed by the inexorable advance of an American tank. The grotesque image of the squashed remains of the civilian male body provides graphic exemplification of the indiscriminate brutality and violence of occupation, irrespective of gender, age or status. It also reinforces the point that cause for shame lies not – or not only – with the civilian Italian population but with the Allied forces who remain indifferent to the human cost of their 'liberation'.

Patierno's summative conceptualisation

Where Cavani's feminist remediation of *La pelle* is marked by its overtly oppositional and corrective approach to the cultural memory of the Allied occupation of Naples, Francesco Patierno's documentary adaptation of Norman Lewis's *Naples'44* – the latter first published in 1978 and translated into Italian in 1993 – takes a more subtle approach. The film conforms to the conventional presentation of the Allied-occupied city as a 'contact zone' between Allies and Neapolitans and reverts to the overwhelmingly male bias of the canonical memory of the occupation, thereby reinforcing it. Moreover, to the extent that it conceptualises occupation as such, *Naples'44* implicitly construes it as partial respite from the ongoing war that continues to threaten the city in the form of aerial bombardment and as an opportunity for military grand-tourism of a rather more elevated kind than that enjoyed by *La pelle*'s Jimmy Wren.

Nonetheless, Patierno's adaptation intervenes on the Italian cultural memory of the Allied occupation in substantial if contradictory ways. First, it incorporates into the Italian

cinematic corpus the perspective of an apparently impartial British observer and reminds contemporary audiences of the notable British presence among the Allied forces. Second, in embracing the perspective of a foreign observer, the film eschews the deep sense of shame that pervades earlier Italian representations of Allied-occupied Naples and abandons the productive autoethnographic practice of talking back to externally produced representations that typifies the Italian canon of cultural memory. Finally, at the same time as it pays homage to the experience of the occupation and works to transmit the cultural memory to a new generation, *Naples'44* signals the pastness of the past. It takes a summative approach to the existing cinematic corpus and deploys archival footage, dispassionate narration, and the corporeal metaphor of an ageing veteran to distance the past from the present and lay the living memory of occupation to rest.

Unlike Cavani's *La pelle*, Patierno's *Naples'44* bears little relation to the social and political concerns of the present day. Although the film is not an entirely isolated intervention on the memory of the Allied occupation, being released just two years after the publication of composer Roberto De Simone's autobiographical account of that experience (2014), its genesis appears to be personal in nature. Patierno attributes his remediation to his father's recollection of his childhood experience of wartime Naples and his recommendation to his son that, 'if you want to understand what happened during those years in Naples, you have to read Norman Lewis's book' (cited in Senatore 2016). Patierno thus credits Lewis's narrative – an outlier in the corpus of representations not only for its British perspective but also for the late date of its publication and translation (see Escolar 2019, 133) – with providing the most authoritative account of Allied-occupied Naples.

The authority Patierno grants *Naples'44* reflects its standing in the popular and academic historiography of the Allied occupation, where it is cited extensively by Anglophone and Italophone historians alike, treated as a reliable source and admired for its compassionate portrayal (Escolar 2019, 132). The work's prominence in the historical sphere is not, however, matched by its standing in the cultural sphere, especially in Italy; it is rarely cited in the context of commemorations of the Allied occupation and has only recently been subject to close critical interrogation, by the US-based Italianist Escolar (2019).¹¹ The text recounts Lewis's experiences serving in the Field Security Service of the British intelligence corps, mediating between the military and the civilian population and vetting potential wives of British servicemen.¹² However, as Lewis's biographer Julian Evans has argued, the book is not the wartime diary it purports to be but a retrospective 'remaking' based on hurried, one-line entries in the writer's wartime notebooks between September and December 1943 and, thereafter, on a 'more detailed and discursive' diaristic account (Evans 2008, 232). Even then, however, *Naples'44* is not the straightforward eyewitness account its 'invented diary technique' might lead one to believe (Evans 2008, 232). Rather, the 'remaking' incorporates 'vast changes' to the content of the notebooks (Evans 2008, 232) and, as Escolar has outlined, the published work is a highly mediated narrative that 'blurs the boundaries of historical referent and literary intervention to its own strategic ends' (2019, 133); it is also in covert dialogue with other cultural representations of the Allied occupation, most notably Malaparte's *La pelle* (Escobar 2019, 140).¹³

Echoes of the latter may be found in Lewis's detailed descriptions of rampant prostitution, gynaecological examinations, 'flamboyant' instances of 'Neapolitan kleptomania' (Lewis 2002, 79), and the infamous banquet scene (see Escolar 2019, 141–143). However, Lewis's book presents as the antithesis of Malaparte's *La pelle* and constitutes a more palatable alternative to the graphic excesses and satirical tone of the Italian author's much maligned epic. Escolar contrasts the baroque prose style and extravagant satire deployed by Malaparte to expose the distortions and moral ambiguities at play in the occupied city with the restrained style of Lewis's narrative. Her detailed analysis undermines the historical



Figure 3. A dead child recovered from the rubble. *Naples'44*, directed by Francesco Patierno, 2016.

authority afforded the British author and offers devastating critique of Lewis's deceptively 'clear-eyed' perspective, arguing that the avoidance of moral complexity and the 'pernicious ... subtlety' of his sober style enable the most extreme stereotypes and Orientalising topoi to masquerade as fact (Escolar 2019, 135, 144).¹⁴

Contrary to Escolar's critical reading, Patierno's documentary reflects the mainstream historical interpretation of Lewis's work as an impartial and authoritative account of Allied-occupied Naples. It follows the broad chronological thrust of Lewis's narrative but condenses some storylines and eliminates others entirely in search of a balance between faithful distillation of the literary original and a compelling cinematic experience capable of resonating with contemporary audiences (see Saturnino 2017). In formal terms, *Naples'44* conforms in part to what Bill Nichols has termed the 'expository mode' of documentary filmmaking, which privileges the rhetorical or narrative frame over the aesthetic or poetic frame and creates the impression of objectivity (2004, 138–144). This mode addresses the viewer directly and relegates the images to an illustrative function, in support of the 'voice-of-God' narration organising the material, driving the film forward and representing its rhetorical perspective (Nichols 2024, 138). Thus, for instance, narrative accounts of destitution, disease and devastation are illustrated by archival images of people queuing for food or attempting to desalinate seawater for drinking purposes; crowds in the street being sprayed with DDT to counter typhus; and bodies of dead children being pulled from the rubble of bombed-out buildings (Figure 3). The apparently faithful approach taken to Lewis's 'diary' extends beyond the chronicling of historical events to incorporate Lewis's close observation of Neapolitan social interactions, sexual mores, religious customs and practices, and superstitious beliefs. Also included are Lewis's criticisms of the Allied command – most notably, his description of General Clark as 'the destroying angel of southern Italy' (2002, 23); his misgivings about the potentially enduring impact of the Allied presence on the sentimental life of the city; and his ever-growing admiration for the resilience and dignity of the suffering Neapolitans.

Yet, Patierno's *Naples'44* departs from the literary source text and from the expository mode of documentary in ways that point to the film's contradictory impulses. Visually, the film is an extraordinary work of montage. It combines never-before-seen historical film footage in black-and-white, retrieved from archives in Italy, the UK and the US, with relatively well-known black-and-white photographs; clips (in both black-and-white and colour)

from Italian and American feature films dramatising the Allied occupation; and colour shots of contemporary Naples. The latter provide visual support for the structuring device underpinning the voiceover narration and the film's mediation between the past of the Allied occupation and present-day Naples: the imagined return to Naples of the ageing Norman Lewis (who had in fact died in 2003).¹⁵ The colour shots also serve to introduce the corporeal metaphor that – in a manner akin to *La pelle* before it – encapsulates the rationale for the remediation of *Naples'44*. However, where the violated bodies of *La pelle* operate on a spatial level insofar as they highlight the continuity of military violence in the supposed safe space of the occupied city, the corporeal metaphor that distinguishes *Naples'44* – the body of an ageing man in reminiscent mood on a return visit to Naples – is characterised by a temporal dimension that serves to communicate the pastness of the past.

The film's assertion of the pastness of the past plays out in various ways. The deployment of newly exhumed archival footage and the meticulous research undertaken to retrieve it speak to the strength of Patierno's desire to do justice to Lewis's account, bring the past to life and reanimate public interest in the Allied occupation of Naples. In her discussion of cinematic remediation, Astrid Erll observes that the integration of historical footage into new cinematic productions serves to create an *effet de réel* and thereby endow such productions with an aura of authenticity. This is because 'what is often integrated via remediation ... is not merely actual documentary material but also its specific "look" (which usually derives from the media technology of the time but also from historical aesthetics)' (Erll 2010, 395). However, while the expository use of archival footage in *Naples'44* bolsters the authority of Lewis's account and provides an aura of historical authenticity, the historical aesthetic may in fact undermine Patierno's stated desire to convey the continuities between the Naples of the 1940s and contemporary experiences of war (see Finos 2016). Certainly, the use of black-and-white footage signals the aesthetic as well as the material and conceptual distance of Allied-occupied Naples from the contemporary city, depicted throughout as a site of leisure and through the medium of colour film.

Furthermore, the film's apparent commitment to historical authenticity is complicated by the juxtaposition of archival footage with clips liberally drawn from a generous corpus of feature films and a single documentary short, all produced between the 1940s and the 1980s. Among the more prominent examples, which range from realist dramatisation to satirical comedy, are Nanni Loy's *Le quattro giornate di Napoli* (1945), Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946); Duilio Coletti's *Il re di Poggioreale* (1961); Mike Nichols's *Catch-22* (1970) and Liliana Cavani's *La pelle* (1981). The inclusion of *Catch-22* speaks to the interrelation of Allied and Italian cultural memories and implicitly presents the cinematic corpus itself as a contact zone between differently articulated memories of the occupation of Naples. The breadth of the corpus reflects the director's aspiration to pay 'homage to the cinema which knew how to narrate those terrible years' (TGcom24 2016). It also speaks to a personal desire to reanimate the cinematic memory of the Allied occupation, which had lain dormant since the release of Cavani's *La pelle* in 1981. Patierno's recirculation – albeit in highly selective form – of elements of the existing corpus, including lesser-known films such as *Chi si ferma è perduto* (dir. Corbucci 1960) and *Il miracolo di San Gennaro* (dir. Emmer and Gras 1948), complements his retrieval of historical footage and signals an attempt to extract such films from 'the storehouse or archive of cultural memory' and return them to the 'actively circulated memory that keeps the past present as canon' (A. Assman 2010, 98).

However, the often-seamless cutting between documentary footage and feature film in *Naples'44* exemplifies Marita Sturken's observation that 'the boundaries between documentary material and fictional reenactment are often blurred in the course of remediation' (1997, 395). This raises questions about the ontological status of the images presented

and their relationship with the voiceover narration. On the one hand, Patierno's montage suggests an undifferentiated and purely illustrative approach to diverse cinematic texts, thereby signalling the constructed nature of *all* representations, irrespective of genre. However, the montage is sometimes indiscriminate to the point of distortion; this is best evidenced by Patierno's incorporation of footage from the 'Rome' episode of *Paisà*, focused on prostitution, rather than the 'Naples' episode, which emphasises the destitution of the city's residents. It is also demonstrated by the choice of clips from *La pelle*, which forefront the figure of Captain Malaparte and disregard entirely the film's feminist reconceptualisation of the occupation. On the other hand, Patierno's liberal recourse to feature film alongside historical footage gestures towards the fictionality embedded in Lewis's retrospective account. Particularly revealing in this regard is the reliance on feature film clips to illustrate assertions relating to the flourishing of the black market, the extent and daring of 'Neapolitan kleptomania', and the pervasiveness of prostitution. While such reliance likely originates in the dearth of documentary footage of illicit or shameful activities, it implicitly acknowledges the tongue-in-cheek nature of many of Lewis's observations (see Escolar 2019, 148) and questions the reliability of both Lewis's account and historical interpretations indebted to it.

Accompanying the visual montage, the narration voiced by Benedict Cumberbatch in the English-language version of the film (and Andrea Giannini in the Italian) is necessarily selective and features heavily condensed excerpts from Lewis's original. The mellifluous and measured quality of the voiceover combines with the dispassionate tone and the anthropological focus of Lewis's description of conditions, customs and cultural practices in Allied-occupied Naples to convey a distanced, nostalgic approach to the past presented. That approach is supported by the elimination of key elements of Lewis's original. These include entire plotlines with graphic depiction of the defilement of Neapolitan women under the Allied occupation; overtly racist accounts of reported mass rapes carried out by French colonial troops; the documentation of Allied officers' dishonesty; and the extensive and highly original discussion of endemic corruption in the Zona di Camorra.

The elimination of these elements – all decidedly pertinent to contemporary concerns – combines with the undifferentiated montage of archive footage and feature film to sanitise the gendered violence of the occupation, downplay its relevance to the present and thereby consign the occupation to history. Supporting that mission is the prominence granted to Lewis's anthropological perspective. This emerges throughout the film, in accounts of civilians who offer their services as informers, for instance, or in the light-hearted reports of the gravity with which extramarital affairs in Naples are conducted. However, it is most evident towards the end of the film, in the extensive descriptions provided of the religious beliefs, superstitions, and customs to which Neapolitans turn 'in a state of nervous exhaustion'. The timeless quality afforded these practices and the generous space granted to the documentary footage detailing the liquefaction of San Gennaro's blood (*Il miracolo di San Gennaro*, 1948) construct Allied-occupied Naples as a world apart, far removed from the mindset of the dispassionate foreign observer. This, then, is a rare form of remediation that, rather than heightening the immediacy of the past to facilitate audience identification, effectively distances it from the here and now of the contemporary audience.

That strategy is embedded from the very outset of *Naples '44*, which opens with an image of the pastness of the past – a classic historical map portraying 'The Invasion of Italy'. The camera zooms out to a split screen to contextualise Lewis's writings in relation to the Allied landings in September 1943, before introducing the motif that structures the film – the figure of the ageing Lewis, whose wanderings amid verdant foliage and the contemporary city evoke the black-and-white memories of the wartime past. In the first such instance, we see the protagonist reach into a hole in a wall to extract a watch inscribed with the name 'N. Lewis' and the date '8-9-43', signifying the date of both Italy's surrender to the Allies and



Figure 4. The stopped watch. *Naples'44*, directed by Francesco Patierno, 2016.

Lewis's first diary entry in *Naples'44* (Figure 4). The stopped clock, the ageing male body, and the nostalgic quality of the scene, heightened by a plaintive string and piano score, eloquently convey what I see as the elegiac quality of the film as a whole. The corporeal metaphor of the elderly author's return combines with Patierno's summative cinematic construction of the occupation to suggest, paradoxically, that the film's primary mission is to stop the clock on the cultural memory of the Allied occupation of Naples and, perhaps, restore it to those who experienced the events first-hand. In this respect, Patierno's film marks the moment of passage identified by Jan Assman (2010, 111) between the 'communicative' or living memory of the past and the moment at which cultural memory proper – the much longer phase when all eyewitnesses and participants have died out – begins. The film thus speaks most directly to the idea that, as we move beyond the living memory of the occupation, we can only revisit it, in effect, as tourists, and in mediated or remediated form.

Conclusion

The cultural memory studies approach presented here isolates the diverse ways in which cinematic remediations of literary texts have sought to intervene in the cultural memory of the Allied occupation of Naples at distinct moments in time. As remediations of literary works, *La pelle* and *Naples'44* consciously engage with the existing cultural memory and work to retrieve this historical episode from the margins of public consciousness in order to reanimate and reshape the cultural memory of the occupation in the light of current realities. But how successful are they in doing so? And to what extent does their relative success reflect the representational strategies deployed? For Astrid Erll, two factors are important when considering 'what ... turns some media (and not others) into powerful "media of cultural memory"' capable of shaping collective images of the past (2010, 390). One is that the potential for memory-making has to be *realised* in the process of reception: 'novels and movies must be read and viewed by a community as media of cultural memory' (2010, 395). The other is that such media of cultural memory are rarely uncontroversial: 'their memory-making effect lies not in the unity, coherence, and ideological unambiguity of the images they convey, but instead in the fact that they serve as cues for the discussion of those images, thus centring a memory culture on certain medial representations and sets of questions connected with them' (Erll 2010, 396).

Reviewing the works analysed in light of Erll's theorisation, *La pelle* clearly emerges as the film with the greater potential for memory-making. The film's gynocentric rewriting of Malaparte's text reflects the feminist turn witnessed in the historiography of the 1970s and brings the experience of the Allied occupation into dialogue with the experiences of women elsewhere in Italy during the Second World War. Its graphic depiction of the violation of social norms in Naples and its reconceptualisation of the Allied occupation as an act of rape are undeniably controversial and present an overtly oppositional stance towards the existing memory culture. In that respect, *La pelle* has strong potential to serve as a cue for discussion and revision of the memory culture. In contrast, the documentary format of *Naples'44* – with its mellifluous narration, its preference for anthropological observation over autoethnographic rejoinder, and its summative but indiscriminate approach towards the cinematic corpus of representation – minimises the potential for controversy and thereby precludes the production of new understandings. Far from oppositional, it presents as symptomatic of the moribund state of the memory culture, amid public indifference towards the Allied occupation of Italy.

In reality, neither *Naples'44* nor *La pelle* has managed to unsettle the dominance of the four 'canonical' works produced during the 1940s or significantly reshape the Italian cultural memory of the Allied occupation of Naples. If the reasons for this are self-evident in the case of *Naples'44*, they are rather more complex in the case of *La pelle*. Despite articulating a radically new understanding of the Allied occupation at a time of vigorous historical re-examination of Italy's experience of the Second World War, the film remains on the margins of the cultural memory. As Giardino outlines, this may be explained not only by the film's graphic content or the disapproval of the critics but also by hostility to feminist filmmaking in the 'increasingly sexist environment' of the Italian film industry (2011, 102) and by the film's anti-American stance. The latter made the film unattractive to the national television industry at a time when commercial television had become crucial to film circulation in Italy. However, it was the effective disappearance of *La pelle* from the circuit following the closure of Gaumont Italia in 1984 (Giardino 2011, 114) that dealt the decisive blow to the film's capacity to revive the cultural memory of the Allied occupation of Naples, bring it into dialogue with the wider memory of the Second World War and thereby construct a more inclusive understanding of Italian experiences of that period of history.

Yet, the very failure of *La pelle* and *Naples'44* to reshape the cultural memory of the Allied occupation of Naples says much about the place of the Allied occupation in the Italian cultural imaginary and about the dynamics of cultural memory. In the first instance, the very existence of these remediations is testament to the persistence (albeit diminishing) of the Allied occupation in the cultural imaginary and of a desire to transmit a particular understanding of that experience to a new generation. Secondly, such remediations provide a clear indication of the relevance of the cultural memory to the wider society at distinct moments in time. Where the provocative stance of *La pelle*'s gynocentric vision of the occupation and its attempt to forge a counter-memory of the experience convey a determination to expose and critique the gender bias of the existing corpus in accordance with the feminist historical revisions of the late 1970s, *Naples'44*'s elegiac and summative re-presentation of the cinematic corpus signals the weakness of that memory in the 2000s, amid the passing of those who experienced the occupation directly. Thirdly, given cinema's status as 'the leading medium of popular cultural memory' (Erll 2010, 397), the 35-year gap between the two films speaks volumes about the correlation between the diminishing cultural memory and the marginalisation of the Allied occupation in the Italian cultural imaginary. Ultimately, what the comparative analysis of *La pelle* and *Naples'44* suggests is that, in the absence of official commemoration and the integration of the experience of

occupation into the wider Italian memory of the Second World War, even the most provocative cultural products will struggle to stem the waning memory and reverse the journey towards oblivion.

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Notes

1. In an earlier publication, I explored the implications of Cavani's treatment of Allied-occupied Naples in *La pelle* in dialogue with feminist and spatial scholarship addressing the gendering of war and military violence in its myriad forms (Glynn 2015).
2. Gribaudi (1997, 1999) precedes me in reading cultural representations of the occupation through the prism of memory studies.
3. Book-length histories of the Allied occupation of Naples include those by De Marco (1996) and Albanese (2014), addressing everyday life in the occupied city, and by Lowe (2024).
4. No single source provides a comprehensive list of Italian cultural products addressing the Allied occupation of Naples; sources are dispersed among Gatt-Rutter (1997); Gribaudi (1997); Wagstaff (1997); Glynn (2017); Escolar (2019). For oral history accounts, including rare female perspectives, see Gribaudi (1997, 1999); Cassamagnaghi (2014).
5. I include under the umbrella of *Napoli milionaria!* the cinematic and televisual adaptations directed by the author in 1952 and 1966; these present as extensions rather than critical remediations of the original, augmenting its status as 'the official and recognised image of Allied-occupied Naples' (Gribaudi 1997, 304).
6. The shame tied to the occupation in cultural representation also stems from historical discourses about the Italian South, as Wagstaff (1997, 548) notes when contrasting the emotional tone of films on Northern resistance and Southern liberation: the North evokes 'hope', while the South, in line with a long cultural tradition, evokes 'shame'.
7. The film thus reflects Adrienne Rich's exhortation to women writers to revisit and 're-vision' the literary works of the past in order to break with tradition and liberate women from the distorted understandings of womanhood presented therein (1972, 18).
8. Relevant here is the press conference scene in which General Cork reminds the journalist that although Malaparte was an early member of the Fascist party, he had spent many of the intervening years in Fascist prisons.
9. All translations of quotes from the film are my own.
10. The cinematic storyline departs from the original, where the 'Virgin' is unknown to Jimmy and the scene revolves around the verification of the girl's intact hymen on the part of a black US soldier. On the racial implications of Cavani's decision, see Escolar (2012).
11. Lewis's book is more widely known in the Anglophone world, where it is read not only as a war diary but also as travel writing. It has inspired at least one literary remediation, Anthony Capella's *The Wedding Officer* (Time Warner Books, 2007).
12. On Lewis's service in North Africa and Italy, see Evans (2008, 199–279).
13. The influence of subsequent representations on Lewis's work is borne out by Patierno whose access to the author's notebooks revealed that he 'too had taken elements of fiction from a film he saw at a later date to tell his profound truth' (Raponi 2016).
14. Where historians have commented on the similarities between *Naples'44* and *La pelle*, they have tended to interpret the proximity between the two accounts as confirmation of events rather than evidence of influence. See, for instance, De Marco 1996.
15. The imagined return is based in fact; Lewis had revisited Naples to 'revive his memories' in advance of rewriting the diaries for publication (Evans 2008, 569).

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Ruth Glynn is Professor of Modern Italian Culture at the University of Bristol, where she works on modern and contemporary Italian culture. Her most recent research addresses Naples, its representation and its relationship with the Italian nation state. Key publications include *Naples and the Nation: Image, Media and Culture in the Second Republic* (Palgrave Macmillan 2025); a special issue on 'City and Nation in Cultural Perspective' (*Journal of Urban Cultural Studies*, 2021); and a major article on Naples in critical theory (*Cultural Critique*, 2020). Previous research addressed Italy's experience of political violence in the 1970s; publications include *Women, Terrorism, and Trauma in Italian Culture* (2013) and the co-edited volumes *Terrorism, Italian Style* (2012) and *Remembering Aldo Moro* (2012).

Italian summary

Questo articolo si focalizza su due rielaborazioni cinematografiche di opere letterarie che trattano l'occupazione alleata di Napoli: *La pelle* (1981) di Liliana Cavani e *Napoli'44* (2016) di Francesco Patierno. Adottando un approccio basato sugli studi della memoria, esamina il corpus delle rappresentazioni culturali dell'occupazione e si interroga sul contributo che le rielaborazioni studiate apportano alla memoria culturale italiana dell'occupazione. L'analisi si concentra sulle diverse strategie utilizzate dai film per rimodellare la memoria culturale dell'occupazione per i rispettivi pubblici.

L'argomento principale è che mentre la rielaborazione della Cavani cerchi di costruire una contro-memoria femminista dell'occupazione alleata, il film di Patierno tradisca un impulso contraddittorio a far rivivere e allo stesso tempo a seppellire la memoria culturale. Concludo chiedendo quanto i due film siano riusciti a diventare significativi 'mezzi di memoria culturale' (Erl 2010, 390) e cosa questo possa dirci sul posto dell'occupazione alleata nella memoria culturale italiana in distinti momenti storici.

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