Introduction

The aim of this book is to analyse how Sardinians and Sardinia have been portrayed in cinema, starting from a systematic examination of the repertoire of images canonised in the literary tradition. Forming part of a body of work in the field of imagology, this study adopts the theoretical principles and methods of the discipline.¹ Since the imagological analysis presented here embraces literary texts and films alike, it becomes necessary to compare the construction of a literary image with that of a cinematic image, and to assess the continuity of a tradition between one medium and the other.

Our starting point is the awareness that every construction of identity is essentially a representation of the Other (or a self-representation) in which what and who is different is never entirely alien and extraneous. Every image of the Other tells us something about its observer as well as the object observed; all knowledge of the Other invariably entails a definition of Self.² In this specific case research is focused not on Sardinian identity pure and simple – a futile enterprise in itself, since it is now generally agreed that identity is a cultural construct rather than an existential characteristic³ – but on the discursive and symbolic representation of Sardinian character in literature and later in films.

The decision to concentrate on cinema rather than other forms of artistic expression derives from the conviction that it played an essential role in 20th-century culture and a belief in the importance of the relations between media representations and cultural identity: “[f]ilms, in the modern world, play a crucial role as a medium of entertainment and culture and in the dissemination of pleasure and desire. Filmic representations, in the context of globalization and the

¹ See Beller and Leerssen 2007.
³ The most influential works in this regard include Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012; Anderson 1991. See also Thiesse 2001 and Hermet 1997.
experience of culture [...] create, challenge, and refashion identities in complex ways". Since this research deals specifically with films, careful account must be taken of the specific features of the cinematic medium, its rhetorical and narrative strategies, its technical characteristics and how all of these developed during the 20th century. It should also be remembered that cinema came into being at a time when European culture was dominated by nationalism, to which the film-maker, with his power of enchantment, gave additional means for the symbolic construction of the idea of national identity. In absolute terms, though, what appears on the big screen is experienced by the spectator as different from himself, which is precisely what makes it fascinating: “cinema makes visible that the self is exotic in the Other’s eyes”.

Imagology: Theory and Methods

This study may be considered imagological because it analyses the repertoire of images developed by European culture to portray the Sardinian character. The discipline which classifies and studies “our mental images of the Other and of ourself”, imagology specifically describes forms of literary and cultural representation of national characters. The present research is in line with this tradition of study, of which Hugo Dyserinck was a pioneer and has been a fundamentally influential figure since the launch of the Aachen Programme.

The concept of image is in this volume understood as “the mental silhouette of the other, who appears to be determined by the characteristics of family, group, tribe, people or race”. Such mental images of national character are not the result of simple perception of reality or of experience gained from an encounter with members of another ethnic group (French, Germans or Italians in the flesh) – indeed they are not capable of objective corroboration. They are rather a product of the synthesis of what we observe and our approach to

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4 Dissanayake 2006: 43.
5 Leech and Bussi 2003: 11.
7 Beller and Leerssen 2007: XIII.
8 Dyserinck 1982 and 1988. Leerssen’s imagological programme is mostly based on, and an elaboration of, Dyserinck’s Aachen Programme.