

Cecilia Mangini – Terrassen

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Bio Carl, Cinemateket



Viennale Memories: Cecilia Mangini V'19
2019, 5 min (Youtube)

Ignoti alla città (Unknown To The City)
1958, 10 min (35mm – Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna)

Ignoti alla città (Unknown To The City)
1958, 10 min (DCP – Archivio Paolo Pisanelli)

Sardegna (Sardinia)
1965, 7 min (DCP – Archivio Paolo Pisanelli)

La Passione Del Grano (The Wheat Passion)
with Lino del Fra, 1963, 10 min (DCP – Archivio Paolo Pisanelli)

Maria e i giorni (Maria's Days)
1959, 11 min (PRORES422HQ – Archivio Paolo Pisanelli)

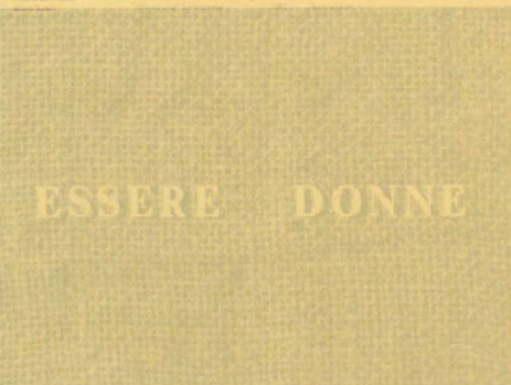
Essere Donne (Being Women)
1965, 29 min (DCP – Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna)

Felice Natale (Merry Christmas)
1964, 14 min (H264 – Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna)

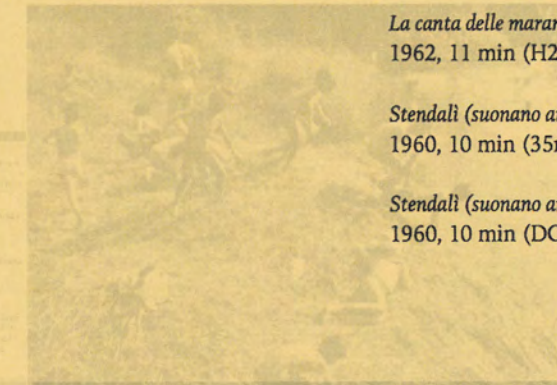
La canta delle marane (The Marshes' Chant)
1962, 11 min (H264 – Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna)

Stendali (suonano ancora) (Stendali (Still They Toll))
1960, 10 min (35mm – Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna)

Stendali (suonano ancora) (Stendali (Still They Toll))
1960, 10 min (DCP – Archivio Paolo Pisanelli)



“If people ask me what I am, I answer ‘I’m a documentary filmmaker’. Even if one hasn’t made any documentaries for years, one is still a documentary maker... It’s true. I have given most importance to a documentary view of reality, starting from the actual material and production conditions of a documentary, from the liberty of expression which is an integral part of it. I’m convinced that a documentary maker has more freedom in making films than someone who makes films based on fiction, and it is for this that my tendency to freedom, with which I have lived since I was a child, has made me a documentary maker. Documentaries are the safest way to make films”



To date, Mangini’s work has been mostly studied in light of its relationship with left-wing Italian politics. This was a natural response to her open, libertarian beliefs and Marxist militancy; indeed, she occasionally collaborated with leftist organizations and faced serious issues with censorship due to her ideological leanings. Nevertheless, she has never been affiliated with a specific party but instead pursued her political engagement through an individual and independent path. Her contribution to a militant rewriting of Italian history, as well as her own film aesthetics, were inspired by a modernist notion of the cinematic apparatus, based on a belief in a fertile relationship between images and the “real.” The prevailing interest in the most explicitly political aspects of her cinema has pushed aside another possible approach, specifically one based on her subjective experience as a woman.

(...)

Mangini’s early shorts were an important contribution to the construction of a new imaginary of the country, which was in the process of modernization brought about by the “economic miracle.” The gradual disappearance of a traditional, rural society produced new configurations of marginality, which Mangini put at the center of her cinema. Indeed, her short films focus on the everyday lives of the urban proletariat, and on marginalized rural groups, that constituted the forgotten faces of the brand-new, wealthy Italy.

(...)

Having directed propaganda films for both the Socialist and the Communist Parties, Mangini was well aware of this. She can be seen as an ideal embodiment of the Gramscian notion of the “organic intellectual” who is actively involved in contemporary debates on the ideological role of culture, despite the fact that women’s participation in the public and cultural sphere was very difficult at the time, even in the left-wing factions.

(...)

The function of the “organic intellectual” presumes a clear sense of self-awareness for an individual within her or his social context, and requires strategies of resistance that start with the observation of everyday dynamics of power. By means of her or his cultural function, the “organic intellectual” mobilizes the subaltern classes and becomes a disruptive element in the hegemonic social structure.

(...)

[...] gender-neutral historical readings still prevail, and experiences such as Mangini’s are usually read outside of their gender specificity and inserted in a male-oriented discourse. This absence in Italian historiography underlines the strength of male hegemony in the Italian cultural context, both historically and in the present.

(...)

Her films were not niche productions; she regularly sought commercial distribution for her major projects so as to improve their chances of influencing an audience. This is why her films often show traces of a negotiation between her “woman’s condition as a woman” and the film industry apparatus. The general context of male hegemony in the industry also influenced the development of Mangini’s theoretical reflections on film practice. Her counterhegemonic practice, indeed, cannot be read as an autonomous discourse that is detached from conventional modes of production, but should rather be considered an attempt to produce a coherent female and militant discourse in the fissures of mainstream practices in order to trouble the hegemonic structures of Italian political and cultural discourses.

(...)

Esfir Shub is pivotal to reinterpreting Mangini’s approach to the archive, as well as to the practice of the compilation film. For *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), Shub researched and sought out the materials on her own, thus contributing directly to the preservation of precious footage of the prerevolutionary period from otherwise inevitable destruction. Thirty-five years later, Mangini did the same with materials of the postrevolutionary period. Working on *To Arms! We’re Fascists!* (1962), Mangini had already found some extremely rare material; for Stalin she found a few little-known fragments from Dziga Vertov’s Kino-Pravda series at the Museum of Modern Art archive, and rescued a sequence of Lenin’s funeral from a farm in New Jersey

(...)

[...] this movie (ed. *Essere Donne*) offers several examples of a counter-cinema aesthetics, in that it leads to a female reappropriation of the cinematic apparatus through a modernist notion of the relationships among cinema, ideology, and militancy. An example of this can be found in the first sequence, where Mangini employs a collage of images from tabloids and women’s magazines in order to unmask their ideological falsehood. The rhythm of montage emphasizes their pervasiveness, reading them—to quote the voice-over—as “leading figures of modernization” that take part actively in the shaping of the “feminine mystique,” which pushes aside the reality of women’s oppression.

Dalila Missero, *Cecilia Mangini: A Counterhegemonic Experience of Cinema* (2016)

Three of her early films involved Pasolini’s collaboration for the commentary. *Ignoti alla citta (Unknowns in [or, Ignored by] the City)* (1958) and *La canta delle Marane (The Marshes’ Chant)* (1961) drew directly on his engagement with the Roman subproletariat borgate: those peripheral milieus largely overlooked even by neorealism. Mangini’s staged and paced choreography of camera and body movements in long group shots and in close-ups beguilingly transposed Pasolini’s vivid sense of place, his physiognomic and linguistic concerns, into the moving image [...]

Noa Steimatsky, *Documentary Poetics as a Field of Action: Cecilia Mangini’s Essere donne* (2019)

“My ‘feminism’ doesn’t exist. Feminism isn’t a part of everything. There are people, and along with them, animals, plants, insects, everything that lives, that thinks, that intuits and feels [...] the most important is égalité, the equality of all humans, men, women, homosexuals, lesbians, transgender people.”

Mangini’s documentary poetics opens up its own “field of action” by drawing women’s concrete experiences into the space and time of cinema. Some of its most vivid instances, realized through the camera’s encompassing of spaces of labor, through its movements linking bodies and actions within their setting; realized, alternately, through the halted, reflexive temporality of radical editing. In all these ways, Mangini’s camera addresses the spectator in a cinematic present tense. How else can we know these women’s experience, since it is their own? *Essere Donne* exhibits at once the struggle of women, and the struggle—the cinema’s struggle—to share experience. This is Mangini’s poetic militancy: it compels our senses and our recognition, which is always also ethical, and political—as in that instant, which repeats to eternity, when Rosetta is left behind the gate when her mother leaves for work in the morning.

Noa Steimatsky, *Documentary Poetics as a Field of Action: Cecilia Mangini’s Essere donne* (2019)

“The military police were at the bridge, Ponte Bianco. They stopped him and seized the tires. But he didn’t leave; he sat down by himself with his empty sack, discouraged. A little later Riccetto, too, came up to Ponte Bianco from the Caciara. “Well?” he said. “I took the tires and they stole them,” Marcello answered, his face dark.

“What are these assholes doing, why don’t they mind their own fucking business,” cried Riccetto.

Beyond Ponte Bianco there were no houses; it was all an immense construction site, at the end of which, on either side of the gully, deep as a stream, through which Viale dei Quattro Venti passed, Monteverde extended, like flaking plaster. And Riccetto and Marcello sat in the sun in a bare, blackened field nearby, watching as the military police robbed people. After a while, though, the group of kids with their sacks of cheese reached the bridge. The soldiers moved to stop them, but the kids wouldn’t budge and began to argue violently, and there was something in their faces that made the soldiers think it was better to forget about it: they let them keep their cheese and even gave back what they’d stolen to Marcello and to the others who’d come over angrily. Skipping with satisfaction and calculating what they would earn, Riccetto and Marcello set off for Via Donna Olimpia, and the others scattered, too. At Ponte Bianco, with the soldiers, all that was left was the smell of garbage heated by the sun.”

Excerpt from *The Street Kids*, Pier Paolo Pasolini (1955), translated from Italian by Ann Goldstein (2016)

Ved Ponte Bianco ventede militærpolitiet. De stoppede Marcello og tog cykeldækkene. Men han ville ikke gå og satte sig modløst med den tomme pose. Snart kom også Riccetto op på broen. ”Hvad nu?”, spurgte han. ”Jeg havde taget dækkene, og de stjal dem fra mig,” svarede Marcello med ansigtet sort af snavs.

”Men hvad fanden laver de dumme svin, hvorfor passer de ikke sig selv?”, råbte Riccetto.

Bag broen var der ingen huse, kun en enorm byggeplads. I bunden lå det glohede Monteverde-kvarter udstrakt bag Viale dei Quattro Ventis plovfure, dyb som en flod. Og Riccetto og Marcello satte sig under solen på en sort, afsvedet mark ikke langt derfra og så på, hvordan militærpolitiet tog røven på folk. Efter lidt tid kom en gruppe drenge med poser fyldt med ost op på broen. Militærpolitiet lagde an til at stoppe dem, men drengene satte hårdt mod hårdt og skreg op og stirrede på dem på en måde, der fik dem til at tænke, at det nok var klogest at droppe det. De lod drengene beholde deres ting, de gav endda Marcello og de andre de ting tilbage, som de havde taget fra dem. Hoppende af tilfredshed regnede Riccetto og Marcello på, hvad de havde tjent, mens de tog Via Donna Olimpia, og de andre spredte sig ud i gaderne. På Ponte Bianco stod militærpolitiet tilbage uden andet end lugten af affald, der bagte i solen.

Uddrag fra *Gadedrengene*, Pier Paolo Pasolini (1955), oversat fra italiensk af Rasmus Bojesen (2021)

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