

Chapter 13

Troubling Progress: *In viaggio con Cecilia's* Journeys of Return

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Abstract

The chapter investigates how the reuse of Cecilia Mangini's documentary films from the 1960s in 2013's *In Viaggio con Cecilia* seeks to reconcile and reinvigorate twentieth century ideals of progress with the increasingly apparent impossibility of a future of unlimited industrial growth presupposed by the kind of modernity envisioned by industrial development in the late 1950s and sixties. I argue that the juxtaposition of the older films alongside contemporary interviews, and the foregrounding of the act of watching cinema itself suggests that an ethos of reflection and return is necessary for environmental and social remediation, and fosters a conception of progress that does not view modernity as a race to either wealth or death. *In viaggio con Cecilia's* use of montage figures looking back, going slowly, and reconnecting to people and place as a vital part of looking forward. It presents the struggle to reconcile the still-unrealized twentieth century desire for social and economic well-being with the twenty-first century realization of the impossibility of "green" growth.

Keywords

documentary; ecocinema; industrial film; found footage; montage.

Introduction

A belatedly celebrated pioneer of documentary and found footage film, Cecilia Mangini was politically and artistically both counterhegemonic and staunchly consistent with post-war Leftist conceptions of Italian modernity. Her documentaries were a sharp counterpoint to those of the industrial film boom in the 1950s and 1960s that valorized Italian industry and its corporate godparents; her militant politics modeled the Communist Party's defense of working-class demands and its critique of capitalist excess¹. As the first female Italian documentary filmmaker, Mangini was also a model for subsequent generations of female directors such as Mariangela Barbanente, whose documentaries would continue to advance topics like labor advocacy and the persistence of the Southern Question. In 2013, the two collaborated on the film *In viaggio con Cecilia* as directors and as protagonists, embarking on a journey of return that was both personal and professional. Both originally from Puglia, they revisit familiar geographic, artistic, and political terrain to confront the environmental and economic devastation wrought by decades of industrial pollution and neglect in Taranto and Brindisi. The documentary consists largely of interviews and conversations between the filmmakers and with workers and community members, but it also incorporates footage from several of Mangini's earlier documentaries exploring the social transformations of the rapidly industrializing South in the 1960s: *Stendali: suonano ancora* (1960), *Essere donne* (1964), *Brindisi '65* (1966), *Tommaso* (1966), and *Comizi d'amore '80* (1982). The earlier films are strategically juxtaposed with contemporary footage to add historical context, narrative structure, and to occasion reflection and critique from the filmmakers, audiences, and from the subjects of the films themselves. In this way, the present-day disaster is figured as a long-term ramification of the economic boom of the 1950s and early 1960s, and prompts a reevaluation of its historical and contemporary imagining. The two narrative layers parallel the cross-generational dialogue that occurs between Barbanente and the then-85-year-old Mangini and proposes a kind of militant cinema that is both focused on change and engaged in mindful reflection on its consequences.

In viaggio con Cecilia posits a message of working-class solidarity through and with the galvanizing affective power of film, ultimately suggesting that political inertia can be overcome and grave harm rectified through commitment to unity and shared goals. Eleven years after its release, this message remains potent even as the continuing dire health and environmental conditions in Puglia demonstrates its limitations, and the accelerating climate crisis begs for new solutions to the disasters sown in the prosperous postwar decades. In the following, I investigate how the reuse of Mangini's earlier documentary

1 On industrial cinema, see in particular Pierpaolo Antonello (2019). On Mangini as counterhegemonic, see Missero (2016).

films in *In viaggio con Cecilia* seeks to reconcile and reinvigorate Mangini's (and Barbanente's) ideals of progress with the increasingly apparent impossibility of a future of unlimited industrial growth, the presupposition of the kind of modernity envisioned by industrial development in the late 1950s and sixties. I argue that the use of the older films suggests through formal experimentation and affect-driven viewership that an ethos of reflection and return is necessary for environmental and social remediation, and fosters a conception of progress that does not view modernity as a race to either wealth or death. This approach to montage figures looking back, going slowly, and reconnecting to people and place as a vital part of looking forward, and presents the struggle to reconcile the still-unrealized twentieth century desire for social and economic well-being with the twenty-first century realization of the impossibility of "green" growth.

Revisiting Puglia on the Ground and on Screen

The film begins, as the title suggests, with a journey. The camera bobs in the backseat of a car as we gaze over the shoulders of Mangini and Barbanente, listening in on their conversation as they traverse a rainy countryside in Puglia. The car, symbol of twentieth century Italian progress, industry, and economic aspiration, suggests a kind of modernity that situates Italy's South and the Global South more broadly as a periphery to either be exploited for resources, land, and labor, or exhorted to "catch up" to the imagined center by establishing industry that has the capacity to exploit resources, land, and labor. Wind turbines, a literal and figurative representation of the triumph of dynamism over immobility, dot the conspicuously empty countryside, a stark contrast to stereotypes of Southern Italy as backward and frozen in time, or idyllic and unchanging. Mangini's first comments emphasize this contrast and make clear her own views on change: «I have to say, the landscape seems much more beautiful to me with the wind turbines»². This is a return home, and an enthusiastic one, but there is no gauzy nostalgia or a homesick longing for time gone by. Mangini's affective connection to this place is compatible with its transformation: «I like the sense that time is passing»³ — perhaps an unexpected sentiment from a woman in her eighties. This first sequence affirms a political and artistic gaze that is both forward looking and deeply engaged with memory: Mangini lovingly recalls her late husband and collaborator, Lino Del Fra, and her childhood in this same countryside. The conversation affirms the coexistence of and positive association between change and contemplative reflection, and conjures a nascent connection between development and return.

2 «Devo dire che il paesaggio mi sembra molto più bello con le pale eoliche». All translations from Italian are my own.

3 «A me piace l'avvertire che il tempo passa».

Mangini's apparent pleasure at seeing the wind turbines also indicates a continued attachment to a onetime dream of industrialization, a dream now «completely shattered in the face of other problems»⁴, as Barbanente comments in the film. «But it was my dream. It was my... a long-awaited thing that finally happened. Industrialization in this country»⁵. Mangini's dream implies a vision of progress that became dominant in the 1950s in which economic growth «became the key ideology of capitalist and actually existing socialist societies» (Schmelzer, Vansintjan, and Vetter 2022: 43). While the realization of her dream lifted many out of poverty and established a working class in a community that had previously been comprised of, according to one former factory worker, «fishermen, artisans, merchants from the provinces, farmers»⁶, *In viaggio con Cecilia* demonstrates how industrialization transformed but did not eliminate the neglect and marginalization of Southern Italy: Taranto and Brindisi, sites of the largest steel producing plant in Europe and what was once the largest petrochemical plant in Italy, respectively, face levels of pollution and abnormally high rates of mortality, child mortality, and cancer for which there has been a broad lack of accountability and reparation even at the time of writing. Viewed in this light, the wind turbines reveal themselves as a loaded example: they are a cleaner alternative to petroleum-based energy sources, but they transform the landscape (according to some, for the worse), they risk harm to wildlife, and their construction requires mining and exploitation of the environment, particularly in areas of the Global South. They represent the bitter contradictions of sustainable development, and, I argue, the central challenge with which *In viaggio con Cecilia* must reckon.

This hesitantly hopeful prologue culminates in the arrival at a bridge, an apparatus representing both progress and return: for the filmmakers (and for the film) it is a literalization of the cliché “a bridge to the past”. Barbanente and Mangini step out of the car and proceed on foot — a deliberate change of pace that evokes Franco Cassano's philosophy of slowness as an antidote to the intensity of speed, production, and waste of the modern world. Going on foot, Cassano writes, gives us time to «love the pauses that enable us to see the road we have covered» (Cassano 2012: 9)⁷. Mangini pauses to reflect on the road covered in both senses, describing the bridge as «the entrance to the Puglia of my childhood», «then many years later, it was a way of talking about Puglia in my documentaries, and then it was the Puglia that reminds me of my father»⁸.

4 «Completamente frantumato di fronte ad altri problemi».

5 «Ma era il mio sogno. Era la mia... un'attesa che finalmente si verificava. Industrializzazione in questo paese».

6 «Pescatori, artigiani, commercianti dalla provincia, contadini».

7 «Amare le soste per guardare il cammino fatto».

8 «L'ingresso alla Puglia della mia infanzia», «che poi è stato la possibilità di raccontare la Puglia nei miei documentari tanti anni dopo, e poi è stata la Puglia che mi ricorda mio padre».

The action slows and becomes more reflective, heralded by Mangini's spontaneous acknowledgement of her own embodied situatedness as an octogenarian returning to her birthplace. The synchronicity of pace and place seems to, as Cassano writes, «elicit involuntary rather than planned thought, the result not of goals or our will, but a necessary thought, the kind that emerges on its own, from an agreement between mind and world» (Cassano 2012: 9)⁹. Puglia as a geographic and symbolic space is realized as a repository of associations and memories that have shaped Mangini's career and, in the forthcoming film, will outline how to reconnect with the past — emotionally, physically, cinematically — in order to chart a path forward. «So the journey has begun, starting from memories»¹⁰, Barbanente tells us via voiceover. «But it's not the past that I want to talk to Cecilia about»¹¹. In fact, referencing the past and using past films to elicit memory, emotion, and potentially action, is precisely the way the two of them access the key issues at stake in contemporary Puglia.

The first filmic journey of return is to Mangini's landmark 1964 documentary *Essere donne*, a controversial and stylistically innovative account of the conditions of the female members of the working class during the years of the economic boom. The film was produced for the electoral campaign of the Communist Party in 1964, but Mangini was granted ample artistic liberty and financial support for the project (Cinquegrani 2023: 103). Its experimental use of music and montage incorporates vivid juxtapositions of Brechtian song and contemporary print ads alongside careful rhymes and repetitions of parallel images, shots, and themes¹². Although widely praised abroad, it was deemed lacking in sufficient technical, artistic, and cultural merit by the ministerial committee of the *Direzione generale dello spettacolo* (General Management of Performance) and was thus not widely screened alongside commercial films, as was typical for short documentaries at the time. Its commercial release aborted by a government that, according to Mattia Cinquegrani, was uneasy with its stark presentation of the enduring economic, social, and personal hardships of women in a supposedly modern and industrial Italy, *Essere donne* was for years only shown at screenings organized by the Communist Party or at the occasional film festival (103-105).

The initial cut from Mangini and Barbanente to *Essere donne* shifts time but not place: we are still in Puglia, but the landscape is now olive trees and farmers instead of wind turbines or factory chimneys. A group of women are hunched

9 «Suscitare un pensiero involontario e non progettante, non il risultato dello scopo e della volontà, ma il pensiero necessario, quello che viene su da solo, da un accordo tra mente e mondo».

10 «Ecco, il viaggio è iniziato partendo dai ricordi».

11 «Ma non è del passato che voglio parlare con Cecilia».

12 See Steimatsky (2019) for Mangini's use of montage and sound, including Brecht and Weil's "Alabama song" in *Essere donne*.

over the dirt gathering olives, as the voiceover tells us that «today industry has appeared even among the olive groves of Southern Italy, but the industrial development of the South is slow»¹³, noting that, apropos of Mangini's dream, «The women gathering olives know that the factory is a necessary transition from backwards working conditions, from the patriarchal relationship with the family and with men»¹⁴. Tense music underscores a shot of one worker's squinting gaze upwards towards a water tower framed by olive trees; the ominous proximity of industry suggests as much ambivalence as optimism¹⁵. Viewed alongside Barbanante and Mangini's contemporary journey, the woman's furrowed brow feels vaguely critical or prescient. What will this "necessary transition" offer to her, and what will it withhold? How might it punish? As *Essere donne* goes on to demonstrate, and as twenty-first century viewers know well, wage labor at a factory hardly ended the kinds of patriarchal relationships that made (indeed, that make) many working women's lives harder.

The juxtaposition between contemporary and 1960s Puglia reveals place as palimpsest: between 1960 and 1965, hundreds of olive trees were be ripped up to make way for the Ilva steel plant, then called Italsider, in Taranto. This violent upheaval is depicted in the 1962 documentary *Il pianeta acciaio*, directed by Emilio Marsilio and written by Dino Buzzati. *Il pianeta acciaio*'s narrative of industrial progress as intimidating but ultimately edifying was more typical of films of the time than Mangini's work. It declares the South «a classical landscape, the sea, the deserted shore, the olive trees, the sun, the cicadas, the peace, the sleepiness. Everything has remained intact and immobile since the times of Magna Grecia»¹⁶. As bulldozers tear up ancient trees by their roots, the voiceover describes and assuages any potential misgivings:

Why? Because the olive trees, the sun, the cicadas, signify sleep, abandonment, resignation, and poverty, and now instead here men have built an immense metal and glass cathedral to unleash inside of it the flaming monster called steel, that signifies life.¹⁷

Unlike their counterparts at the time, Mangini's films do not glorify the factory or its product but rather center the voices, bodies, and lives of workers. This

13 «Oggi l'industria si è affacciata anche tra gli uliveti del mezzogiorno, ma lo sviluppo industriale del Sud è lento».

14 «Le raccogliatrici di olive sanno che la fabbrica è un passaggio obbligato per sottrarsi alle condizioni di lavoro arretrate, al rapporto di patriarcato con la famiglia e con l'uomo».

15 See Steimatsky (2019) for additional analysis of this sequence.

16 «Un paesaggio classico, il mare, la riva deserta, gli ulivi, il sole, le cicale, la pace, la sonnolenza. Tutto è rimasto immobile e intatto dai tempi della Magna Grecia».

17 «Perché? Perché gli ulivi, il sole, le cicale, significavano sonno, abbandono, rassegnazione, e miseria, e ora qui invece gli uomini hanno costruito una cattedrale immensa di metallo e di vetro per scatenarvi dentro il mostro infuocato che si chiama acciaio e che significa vita».

perspective endures in *In viaggio con Cecilia*, in which interviews and personal narratives predominate.

From this cinematic shift backwards in time, the narrative returns to a contemporary highway to Taranto, now «a city in turmoil»¹⁸. In 2012, the plant's most polluting furnaces were temporarily shut down and the owners put under house arrest for willfully ignoring environmental and health issues caused by the emission of minerals, metals, and carcinogenic dioxins. Labor unions, alarmed by the potential factory closure and risk to their jobs, went on strike, demanding that the factory be modernized to minimize the dangers of pollution without risk to the 20,000 jobs the site sustained (Kington 2012; *La Repubblica* 2012). Since then, the factory has been taken over by the Italian government and sold to a different steel producer for cleanup, transferred back to the government, and is currently embroiled in legal battles over ownership and responsibility (*Reuters* 2024). Some efforts at cleanup and prevention of further pollution have been made, but the pollution and its effects have not disappeared and the site remains a subject of the contentious struggle to achieve, as a 2023 World Health Organization report put it, «a fair balance between the right to health and the protection of the environment, on the one hand, and the right to work and secure an income on the other» (Who 2023: 5). Mangini and Barbanente arrived in the summer of 2012, when the percolating unease and anger of the community bubbled over into strikes and road closures. True to her Marxist bona fides, Mangini positions herself alongside the workers literally and symbolically, but the film makes clear that the voices of striking workers overlap not infrequently with those who mourn, agitate against, and study the fallout of the environmental damage and human suffering. These are not two sides in opposition, but an ambivalently implicated community with a long history of being sidelined and instrumentalized by the supposed exigencies and opaque promises of progress.

At the Factory Gates: Cross-Generational Conflict and Connection

In Taranto, as at the bridge in the prologue, geographic space links memory with subjectivity and prompts forward-looking reflection. The film's next return is to the Ilva steel plant, where Mangini interviews three former workers she first met thirty years prior in front of the same factory while filming the documentary *Comizi d'amore '80* with Del Fra. What did it mean to them, she asks, to be part of this emerging working class, to enter the factory and participate in this «great movement of industrialization in the South?»¹⁹.

18 «Una città in fermento».

19 «Grande passo dell'industrializzazione del mezzogiorno».

As Mangini pronounces these words the camera passes over memorial notices on the factory walls, hinting at the alarming rate of cancer deaths in the local community — 15% above the national average, or 400 people in 13 years (Kington 2012). “Industrialization” is linked visually with these death notices, which workers casually pass on their way into the factory. In response to Mangini’s question, the three former workers describe an «awareness of belonging»²⁰ that suggests the optimism behind Mangini’s dream of industrialization; a vision of industrial progress and modernity that is strengthened by working class solidarity, and vice versa. They speak about the environmental crisis as something that can and must be rectified through sound organizing and political will: «the plants can be made safe. It’s an issue of the will of the businessman and also an issue of everyone’s role»²¹. Then as now, one former worker says «what’s needed, what was needed then and is needed even more now, are institutions, and policies, that we have to mobilize, that shouldn’t settle for compromises»²². These workers advocate, it seems, for an ecological modernization of capitalism, in which workers are powerful agents but nonetheless subject to the constraints of a vision of progress based on the growth of profit.

Mangini then turns to the current generation of workers now milling about the factory gates: «Do you agree with what a former Italsider worker is saying? You don’t have anything to say? Nothing? Not even a criticism? A dissent, an approval? A declaration of protest?»²³. Her embodied and historically situated subjectivity is on prominent display here; her hands, face, and voice evidence the passage of time and its effects as she energetically chastises the younger men around her. She thinks and speaks as a nomad, as Rosi Braidotti writes, «[stressing] the idea of embodied and embedded material structure of what we commonly call thinking» (2011: 16). Mangini brings with her an embodied perspective shaped by age, political history, and her filmmaking career, granting her a unique position among the numerous artists who have sought to make sense of this disaster in recent years²⁴. Although she no longer lived in Puglia at the time of filming, as a filmmaker she is familiar with the deep roots of this crisis, and as a longtime Marxist politically shaped by the struggle against Fascism, she is firmly committed to effecting change through collective action in the face of injustice. She harnesses the “embodied material structure” (Braidotti 2011) of thinking to insist here on a cross-generational dialogue, urging the present

20 «Coscienza di appartenenza».

21 «Gli impianti possono essere messi in sicurezza. È un problema di volontà dell’imprenditore e un problema anche di ruolo di tutti quanti».

22 «Quello che ci vuole, ci voleva allora e ci vuole ancora di più oggi, sono le istituzioni, e la politica, che si deve mobilitare, che non deve scendere a compromessi».

23 «Siete d’accordo con quello che dice un ex-operaio dell’Italsider? Non avete nulla da dire? Nulla? Neanche una critica? Un dissenso, un apprezzamento? Una dichiarazione di contrarietà?».

24 See Monica Seger (2018) for a longer discussion of the recent work on this topic.

workers to make some use of the reflections proffered by their older counterparts. The film thus encourages viewers to listen to but not accept uncritically the presumptions that might have solved the problems of earlier decades.

This scene of uncomfortable silence then cuts to a parallel scene from Mangini's short documentary *Brindisi '65*, in which a group of workers taking a course for foremen (*capo operai*) sits silently at their desks when asked if they would like to critique, question, or make suggestions to the management at the Monteshell petrochemical plant. The off-screen voice mimics Mangini's exhortations in rhetoric and intonation: «Do you have any criticisms to make to the management of Monteshell? Of their business politics, their technical and labor systems? [...] You don't have anything to say?»²⁵. Unwilling to risk their slightly elevated position, the workers are silent. The film creates an echo in reverse, a delayed resounding across decades: Mangini seems to be evoking her earlier film when she speaks to the workers (crucially, allowing herself to be visible to the camera in *In viaggio con Cecilia*), but the echo is clear only upon cutting back to *Brindisi '65*. Mangini and Barbanente use the earlier film to demonstrate and press against what is framed as enduring resignation, an unwillingness to learn from the errors (or, if we are to believe the proud retired Ilva workers, the triumphs) of the past. Parallel scenes of perceived apathetic or intimidated behavior are repurposed, and through their juxtaposition function as a subtle but forceful indictment; a spur to action and renewed solidarity among workers across generations.

The clip from *Brindisi '65* includes a brief cut to a puppet show, adding another mediatic layer that reminds us of Mangini's long standing proclivity for experimentation and use of layered montage to build critique. In close up, we see a papier-mâché face trembling anxiously behind a set piece, mirroring the stony faces of the workers fidgeting behind their desks when prompted to speak out. The full scene in *Brindisi '65* provides context: workers watch a puppet show about an aborted romance, in which a young worker cowers and shakes behind a tree at the recriminations of his beloved's father, who refuses to let his daughter marry a factory worker. The three nested scenes feature workers shirking authority, unable to recognize the parallels now made evident for viewers of *In viaggio con Cecilia*. The sequence in front of the Ilva plant concludes with the words of two of the older workers reflecting on the struggles of the younger generation, and on their fear at speaking out. «They're afraid. And it's not right. These are people who work, who provide for their families, provide... provide wealth for the country. Steel is wealth»²⁶. The echoes of *Il pianeta acciaio* and films like it are clear: in it, steel is named as a symbol of work and prosperity;

25 «Avete delle critiche da fare alla direzione della Monteshell? Alla sua politica aziendale, ai suoi sistemi tecnici e di lavoro? [...] Non avete nulla da dichiarare?».

26 «Hanno paura. E non è giusto. È gente che lavora, porta il pane a casa, dà... dà ricchezza al paese. L'acciaio è ricchezza».

«producing a lot of steel means that a country is doing well»²⁷. At Ilva, another worker insists that the Riva family — the former owners recently placed under house arrest — «are not “businessmen” but rather “bosses”»²⁸. The difference, he explains, is that the businessman has «an economic, a social logic, that — if its in a certain way — is really useful [...] but bosses don’t»²⁹. In the full version of *Brindisi ’65* (notably not included in *In viaggio con Cecilia*) the sequence continues with the monologue of another worker, his face in shadow, declaring that the workers who do not speak out are afraid to lose the marginal economic privilege they have as foremen and therefore do not see themselves as on the same side of the other workers. This generation seems to have accepted the notion that “businessmen” should continue to enrich themselves at the expense of others, provided the working conditions are fair enough. The apparent contradiction parallels the kinds of contradictions encountered by the Communist Party in the postwar period as they sought to balance critiques of consumerism and mass culture with the practical advantages offered by economic growth (Gundle 2000). The camera pans across the faces of the young workers as the older worker insists that «to get past this, you need unity. Fear won’t get you anywhere»³⁰. The panning shot echoes that of the earlier film; the workers stare intently listening to the older man, inversely echoing the vacant spectatorship of the earlier generation. Despite their encouraging words to the other workers to renounce fear and work together for better regulation, the two older workers betray a faith in industry as a social good that the interceding years have, along with Mangini’s dream «completely shattered in the face of other problems»³¹.

The film then reverts to a different era, still in front of these factory gates, with a cut to a clip from *Comizi d’amore ’80*, of a bustling market with heaps of freshly harvested mussels on display, odds and ends for purchase, and workers going about their lives. Here, underscored by the thrum of rock music, the factory entrance pulsates with the energy of change and possibility, perhaps uneasy but not unoptimistic. The same three workers appear, thirty years younger, chatting casually with the filmmakers about changing sexual mores, stereotypes of Southern jealousy and revenge, and the recent advent of pornographic magazines. *In viaggio con Cecilia* then reveals that we are watching alongside these same workers. They sit facing the camera, while the film plays on a small screen, the back of which is partly in view. Wordlessly, smiling slightly, they watch and listen to their younger selves. One points out to his companions that this film features an older method of production that was eventually transformed and replaced:

27 «Se si produce molto acciaio vuol dire che un paese sta bene».

28 «Non sono imprenditori ma padroni».

29 «Una logica economica, sociale che — se è in un certo modo — è utilissima [...] ma i padroni no».

30 «Per riuscire a superare, ci vuole l’unità. La paura vi porta comunque a niente».

31 «Completamente distrutto di fronte ad altri problemi».

we had hundreds of discussions in the union to reorganize work around this new technology. And we always set up this — no? This inseparable connection between work systems, security, environment, and productivity!³²

Prompted by an emotional connection to their past selves, they return to that era for a possible solution.

Mangini may have longed for industrialization in Italy, but her early films are clear-eyed about what such a thing could and could not accomplish, and about the perils of foregrounding industry and obscuring workers. The next clip in *In viaggio con Cecilia* is from *Tommaso* (1966), a short documentary about a young man in Brindisi who longs to work in the newly opened petrochemical factory so he can buy a motorcycle. A bus slowly drives through the open factory gates in *Tommaso*, as the older film's voiceover counters the optimism of the three workers from the earlier scene: «Contrary to appearances, he won't be the one who chooses. The priority of choice is up to the monopoly, which is counting on him and thousands like him, defenseless, underemployed, laborers»³³. The cognitive dissonance produced by cinematically setting this narration alongside and against the idea of the entrepreneur as a social good is jarring, and sets up the film to further counter zealous optimism around the intentions of industry. The same narration carries on under contemporary footage of workers boarding a modern bus to a factory. Outside of the factory gates, it says, lies «the same old subordination. And this is not a choice»³⁴. The parallel scenes of bussed workers and the overlapping voiceover link the struggles of the two eras through what Noa Steimatsky has elsewhere called Mangini's characteristic «intricate lacing of details through visual alliterations and rhymes» (2019: 110). Then as now, the choice is often between the subordination of un- or under-employment, and work in an industry that produces wealth but not equality.

Emotional Encounters Through and With Film

The incorporation of the earlier documentaries stitches together time and place, insisting on the enduring presence of history and on film's countercultural agency as an archival object. The other primary means by which *In viaggio con Cecilia* uses the reproduction of the older films is through engaging the emotional power of viewership and memory. This affective agency of films is first alluded to in the opening sequence, in which Barbanente asks Mangini

32 «Abbiamo avuto centinaia di confronti sindacali per riorganizzare il lavoro su questa nuova tecnologia. E noi abbiamo posto sempre questo, no? Questo nesso inscindibile tra organizzazione di lavoro, sicurezza, ambiente e produttività».

33 «Contrariamente alle apparenze, non sarà lui ad aver scelto. La priorità di scelta spetta al monopolio, che conta su di lui e sui migliaia di suoi simili, indifesi, sottoccupati, braccianti».

34 «La vecchia subordinazione. E questa non è una scelta».

about the last film she made, *La briglia sul collo* in 1974. Mangini says she is «very attached»³⁵ to the film, particularly because whenever it is screened she can hear the voice of her late husband: «every time it's projected and I hear his voice and it's so — a moment... a moment»³⁶, she says, unable to fully capture the feeling in words — it is most or perhaps only accessible through recorded sound. When the former workers watch their younger selves and the “old technology”, the material embeddedness of the film watching experience suggests to them a way to recontextualize the past and reimagine the future. The workers' discussion of the development of new technology and their union's subsequent successful efforts to balance “work, security, environment, and productivity” seems to heartily endorse the possibility that new technology and institutional will can have a similar impact on the environmental futures of Taranto, an optimistic perspective that, I suggest, is countered by the challenges of the years since *In viaggio con Cecilia* was filmed (Giuffrida 2024).

Mangini's emotional reaction to hearing her husband's voice on film foreshadows a subsequent scene in which Mangini recognizes on the street one of the subjects of *Tommaso*. Prior to this encounter, we see the clip from *Tommaso* to which she will subsequently refer in. Rather than echoing a scene from the present after the fact, as in previous sequences, now Barbanente and Mangini offer clear chronological contiguity, inviting us into an experience of memory that has thus far been unavailable. A young man speaks directly to the camera as he repairs a radio, first introducing himself by name as «Corvetto, Antonio», then describing his qualifications and his difficulty finding work both locally and elsewhere in the country. Back on a street in present-day Puglia, the camera follows an older man from behind, and as Mangini becomes visible in the frame and turns to face the camera she is clearly moved. When he introduces himself exactly as he does in the film, Mangini completes his sentence and recites from memory the remainder of his monologue. She greets him warmly, embracing and kissing him on both cheeks, saying «you're young for all time, you're eternal»³⁷. Every time she re-watches this film at public screenings, she says, one hand on his shoulder, gazing wistfully at the screen in her mind's eye, «when you arrive — and you'll see now — you're the first sign of something that in this expectation of Southern redemption that gives a sense that not everything is going to go well»³⁸. Mangini's experience of re-watching does not bring about the sense of renewed possibility hinted at by the former Italsider workers, but what seems to be a welcome premonition, or a provocation: “A sense that not everything is going to go well”. Without this, the film implies, one

35 «Molto affezionata».

36 «Tutte le volte che lo si proietta sento la sua voce ed è così... un momento, un momento...».

37 «Sei giovane di tutti i tempi, sei eterno».

38 «Quando arrivi tu — e lo vedrai adesso — sei il primo segno, così, di qualcosa che in questa aspettativa di riscatto di mezzogiorno dà un senso che non tutte le cose andranno per bene».

might read the industrial march forward in too uncomplicated a light, with too little attention on those marginalized by its promise or most susceptible to its abuses. As Corvetto recounts his work experiences since they last met, Mangini compliments his persistence, remarking that he is an example of how «you must never give up»³⁹ — which she notes is already evident in his presence in the film. «Now we'll see together»⁴⁰, she says, taking him by the arm as they enter a theater to re-watch *Tommaso*. We are privy to his and the audience's reactions, as well as several frames of the film itself, it is an invitation to solidarity with their experience of viewing and with the subjects on the screen. Mangini's emotional encounter on and in front of the screen signifies that, as Valeria Castelli has written, her and Barbanente's solidarity, their «being in the street» with their subjects «has a collective value, rather than a narcissistic or selfish one», and that «the display of Mangini's and Barbanente's emotions by means of their performances on screen has this same function» (Castelli 2018: 239).

The titular character in *Tommaso* reappears in *In viaggio con Cecilia* only via archival footage from the film, careening through dusty courtyards and wind-swept laundry lines on a borrowed motorcycle. Tommaso Lo Russo wants only to go fast; he longs to work at the Monteshell petrochemical factory so he can buy his own motorcycle that «goes as fast as I say»⁴¹. His onscreen presence in *In viaggio con Cecilia* is another echo in reverse of an earlier scene, in which a woman mourning the loss of her father holds up a black and white photograph of a similar young man on a scooter — her father, who has died from an illness caused by his exposure to chemicals at the plant. «We children are the indirect victims of the petrochemical reality»⁴², she says, acknowledging the connection across generations and her sense of obligation to continue a fight for accountability that many have deemed hopeless. «I have to continue in his place, to ask for the truth because so many dads can't»⁴³. In the original film, Tommaso's proclaimed desire for speed is juxtaposed with images of rural poverty and the threatening monotony of factory workers being bussed to and from work, at the mercy of their employers and hazardous conditions, as well as a memorial for a worker killed on the job, a harrowing echo of the notices on the factory gates at Ilva. Tommaso wants only to go fast: positioned in the latter half of *In viaggio con Cecilia*, his character becomes emblematic of an urgency for progress that does not account for danger or allow for reflection. Such reflection reveals unexpected and uncomfortable continuities with the past — the need to work and the desire to acquire, the neglect of communities in the South — and invites a closer re-viewing of films that were once relegated to archives.

39 «Non bisogna mai arrendersi».

40 «Adesso lo vediamo insieme».

41 «Va forte come dico io».

42 «Noi figli siamo le vittime trasversali della realtà petrolchimica».

43 «Devo continuare io al posto suo, a chiedere la verità, perché tanti papà non possono».

As Laura Di Bianco has written, «retrieving Mangini's work [...] to give it visibility and to make it signify again» (2023: 20). Mangini's films were once difficult to access outside of festivals or archives, but the past several years have seen growing interest in her work. Many of her documentaries are now available on YouTube, a development likely connected to the expansion of streaming and the attendant response of archival organizations like *Archivio Luce Cinecittà* and *Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico*. It also seems probable that the increasing awareness of the urgency of environmental crises like those in Puglia and the tragic consequences of fossil-fuel driven climate change makes Mangini's prescient early films newly relevant and her present-day determination inspiring.

The situation in Taranto — collective action and mobilization, as well as some level of accountability — seems to be presented as a positive example of the power of organized labor and judicial intervention compared to the circumstances in Brindisi, another troubling example of post-industrial reality. From the early 1960s until the late 1990s, Brindisi had a thriving working class employed by the Monteshell petrochemical plant. Since cleanup operations began in the 1990s, there are now a fraction of the number of workers, and no legal or judicial accountability for the workers who became ill and died as a result of their employment. According to the adult son of one such worker, the gradual closure of the plant and the lack of any state intervention to remedy, substitute, or compensate for employment has crippled the town economically and socially. Attempted cleanup has resolved little; he laments that the promises never materialized into action⁴⁴, and the effort has eviscerated the working class rather than empowered and cared for it. Cleanup «was anti-economical, obviously it's more convenient to produce in Bhopal than here»⁴⁵, he says with a bitter chuckle, hinting at the grim reality of capitalist expansion — green or otherwise — that must find new peripheries to exploit by way of industrial development. In their interview, Mangini expresses the great sense of loss she feels that so much built after the Second World War seems to have been tossed out by the ruling classes. Her sense of indignation, however, is not resigned or retrograde, but rather doggedly focused on the future: «We have to learn how to say no, we have to learn how to express dissent, we have to learn to... to be openly against everything that's happening, and say it, and never get tired of saying it»⁴⁶.

The film concludes by directing its gaze upward and, in a sense, back to a generation prior to Mangini's. The filmmakers look upwards and the camera

44 The speaker comments that the cleanup projects have not taken place as of filming. As of July 2024, Eni's current site includes a lengthy description of ongoing efforts in Brindisi (Eni n.d.).

45 «Era anti-economico, conviene ovviamente di più produrre a Bhopal che qui».

46 «Bisogna imparare a dire di no, bisogna imparare a esprimere dissenso, bisogna imparare a... a essere francamente contrario a tutto quello che succede, e dirlo, non stancarsi mai dirlo».

follows, around a gnarled but verdant tree in a sunny piazza, as text appears on the screen for the first time: «All of the seeds have failed except one, I don't know what it is but it's probably a flower and not a weed» Gramsci 1965: 164)⁴⁷. The quote is by Antonio Gramsci, from a letter he wrote to his sister-in-law, Tatiana Schucht, from while in prison. In that dire situation, we imagine, he understood that there were still seeds of hope and possibility, even if the shape of their eventual fruition was not yet clear. The reference to Gramsci is also a reminder of the political tradition of which Mangini, and to some extent Barbanente have been a part, in which industry, development, and a robust working class in the South represented great possibility and promise. However, the decades since the Second World War and the accelerating climate catastrophe have taught progressive thinkers to creatively revisit what a post-capitalist world might look like. In the anthropocene, as Kohei Sato has written, «if there is a slight hope of a revival of Marxism in this historical conjuncture, its essential precondition is the radical reformulation of its infamous grand scheme of 'historical materialism'» (2023: 2). While obliquely acknowledging “old” materialisms, so to speak, for which humans were the unquestioned center around which all political energy churned, the film's last image asks us to think about a new materialism, in which the old binarisms are less useful than recognizing interdependency between public and private, and between human and non-human. Environmental justice demands urgent revision of the notion of solidarity as restricted to the human, and the philosophy and politics of degrowth encourage us to reimagine entirely the absolute necessity of industry as we know it. *In viaggio con Cecilia* invites debate on how new materialisms and reimagined engagement with non-human elements, in particular film itself, can draw from the political struggles of the past to creatively address problems in the present and future. This final shot, across and upwards as the sunshine filters through the leaves, offers tentative hope from the past layered onto an unexpected perspective towards the future, and an unusual moment of dwelling on and in nature. It recalls the olive trees in *Essere donne*, torn up in what was seen as a necessary step in the great industrial transition, and the women below gazing upward at an uncertain future. Now the women gazing upward have, however, earnestly engaged with remnants of the past and used them to foster reflection and possibility, if not easy solutions. Harnessing the networks of affective relationships between filmmakers, film, filmed subjects, audiences, and geographical space, *In viaggio con Cecilia* makes use of interactions between humans and their non-human counterparts — film itself, the natural and built environments, and the pollution and disease that have emerged from their contact — to generate new political energy towards contemporary crises.

47 «Tutti i semi sono falliti eccettuato uno che non so cosa sia, ma che probabilmente è un fiore e non un'erbaccia». Originally cited in Valeria Castelli (2018).

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