

# Creating Another Screen

I founded the streaming platform Another Screen in March 2021 to present a partial retrospective of the work of Italian documentary filmmaker Cecilia Mangini (1927–2021). I had seen Mangini’s last film, *Due scatole dimenticate* (*Two Forgotten Boxes*, with Paolo Pisanelli, 2020), at International Film Festival Rotterdam, having previously only seen unrestored, low-resolution scans of her midcentury work on YouTube. I had read as much as I could online about her films made in the late 1950s through the early 1970s, which chronicles Italy’s so-called economic miracle and the rituals and communities that were disappearing with it. Later that week in Rotterdam, I saw her speak as part of a panel discussion on “being a woman filmmaker”; organized by one of the festival’s curators, the panel brought together a collection of women working in very different contexts who all happened to have films showing that year. Mangini responded to the moderator’s non-specific and baggy questions with the lack of inhibition that so often comes with age, not to mention the outsider status conferred on her by both her gender and a funding and distribution system particular to Italy that forced documentary filmmakers in the 1960s to, in Mangini’s words, “act under the radar like drug dealers.”<sup>1</sup> I was taken by her incredible presence and sense of humor and arranged to interview her a month later in Rome. That was February 2020. I didn’t make it to Rome that year, of course, and woke up to the news of her death one morning the following January.

I was desperate for other people to experience Mangini’s work, much of which had only recently been restored, but I had nowhere to show it. The majority of her films are around eleven minutes long; a duration that generally only seems appropriate in a festival or gallery setting. (In the 1950s

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1 Gianluca Sciannameo, “Nelle Indie di quaggiùuaggi di quaggiuaggi il cinema etnografico,” Palomar, Bari, Italy, 2006. Translation by Livia Francini.

and 1960s, they were shown as part of a ten- to twelve-minute slot in Italian cinemas, prior to the feature the audience had come to see.) Perversely, their brevity turned out to be rather perfect for a pandemic-era attention span. I didn't expect the archive that holds the majority of her films—many of which hadn't even been scanned in 2021—or the films' various rights-holders to agree for them to be put online, let alone without any temporal restrictions or geoblocking. To do Mangini and the specificity of Italian documentary history justice, and to try and preemptively counter the ambivalence I expected the Cineteca di Bologna would feel about having her work streamed online, I proposed to commission a new piece of writing on Mangini and a translation of an interview with her I had found in an out-of-print Italian book. I also suggested we subtitle the films in five languages and assured them that I would also reach out to festivals and exhibitors to gauge their interest in showing the films in person once cinemas reopened. The archive agreed without any pushback.

I designed Another Screen's website to feature each curated program on a single page. Despite the inevitability of one film coming higher up on the page than another, this meant that all the films could be given equal space. Nothing can replace the wonderful unpredictability and uncanniness of being one of a collection of strange bodies in the same dark room, yet I imagined Another Screen's visitors as more like visitors to a gallery than cinemagoers. Text and image were juxtaposed; the idea was that a visitor could "wander through" (scroll up and down) the program, reading the "wall text" before deciding which piece of work to linger on first. At that point, I hadn't yet considered whether Another Screen would have a future beyond the Mangini program. But its presentation—which aims to place films in their historical context and, through interviews, essays, and the films themselves, give them a new or more extensive life through translation—set a precedent for future programs. This presentation also, I hope, prevents Another Screen from becoming a content mill. The platform's programs are also intentionally irregular, reflecting and drawing attention to the fact that writing, translating, and editing take time.

Before the pandemic, I had been dispirited by the cinematic landscape in London, where I was living, as it seemed only to serve (or rather to generate) a largely passive, unimaginative, and moneyed spectator. Then, in the pandemic's first wave, a seemingly infinite amount of challenging work was made freely available to anybody with an internet connection; suddenly, those who had never previously engaged with so-called experimental work were making their way down the rabbit hole of artists' Vimeo pages and were drawn to the websites of galleries sharing the work of artists they represent. The pandemic did force artists to accept exposure over any real-world currency, but the fact that viewers didn't have to be based in a metropolitan center and that young people might be engaging with this work without their parents' assistance was genuinely exciting and unprecedented. (I wonder what the wave of cine-literate films from filmmakers of this generation will look like.) For my part, I have to confess that the hyper availability of work in those first few months felt so exhausting that I ended up barely watching anything, even though I drew up a spreadsheet and a schedule. At that

moment, I was paralyzed by feelings of uncertainty and cynicism about the role and power of feminist film theory and criticism to act on the world in any real way. Already in the 1980s, Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane had suggested that feminist film theory had become “cut off from its original sense of bold innovation and political purpose.”<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, B. Ruby Rich called it an “area of study rather than a sphere of action.”<sup>3</sup>

I still feel that way somewhat, so *Another Screen* represents my reaction to the way in which women and other marginalized filmmakers have been marketed by the increasing number of streaming platforms and the corresponding influx of available content. Through their restricted, unimaginative lexicon, most streaming services suggest that these filmmakers have to be *discovered*, *pioneers*, or *firsts* to be worth watching. That last epithet is especially troubling because, as film scholar Elena Gorfinkel noted on Twitter, “to reify the /first/ women directors is to promulgate a highly dubious notion of film historical development & transformation, a limited idea of film history, obscuring other makers & material conditions.”<sup>4</sup> In addition, the idea of a *first* has the unwanted result of emphasizing the role of the director above other film workers; it diminishes the contribution of editors, costume designers, and script supervisors—roles which were, and still are, more likely to be occupied by women. These epithets are obviously part of marketing strategies and may be intended as a means to the laudable end of bringing more people to the work.

As a nonprofit, however, *Another Screen* attempts to frame the films in more complex ways. The publication of both contemporary and new texts allows visitors to grapple with the reception of the films at the time of their release and invites them to reconcile the sometimes difficult political legacy with our contemporary moment. I think it important to give space, where possible, to the personality of the filmmaker via extended interviews, so that they can express how they feel about being “discovered” or “rediscovered.” To move away from what I consider to have become tired territory, the texts we publish about the films tend not to address representation; I consider the assessment by a writer of whether a protagonist’s image is positive, negative, or complex to be much less interesting than the film’s historical and national context. I try to remain vigilant of what is inevitably lost in showing films online, and consequently I often feel much more comfortable presenting material that was made on video or for television, such as the militant videos of Carole Roussopoulos from the 1970s and the televisual interviews con-

2 Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane, “The Female Spectator: Contexts and Directions,” *Camera Obscura* 7, no. 2–3 (1989): 5–27.

3 B. Ruby Rich, “In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism,” in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 28.

4 Elena Gorfinkel (@cinemasma), “This opens onto the problem of fetishising ‘firsts’; to reify the /first/ women directors is to promulgate a highly dubious notion of film historical development & transformation, a limited idea of film history, obscuring other makers & material conditions. Give up the fetish!,” Twitter, July 15, 2021, 8:32 a.m., <https://twitter.com/cinemasma/status/1415650439169777668>.

ducted by Marguerite Duras in the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Our films are kept online for a minimum of a week and a maximum of three weeks so as not to jeopardize in-person exhibition opportunities or to let the films linger and lose value to over-availability. Finally, a growing pool of translators has allowed us to reach audiences in countries more resistant to the exhibition of subversive work, including Japan, South Korea, Russia, and Indonesia.

One of the things I love most about going to the cinema is gauging the reaction of other viewers as they filter out of the theater, listening in on insightful and often hilarious snippets of conversation. Another Screen has allowed me, through tools for communication such as Letterboxd and Twitter, which are often similarly unfiltered, to eavesdrop in a similar way on interpretations of films that extend beyond the perspective of Western feminism and to facilitate fascinating analyses that extend across languages and give the films I share with the world a new and more extensive life.

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5 "The Practice of Disobedience: The French Feminist Video Works of Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig and Co.," *Another Screen*, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.another-screen.com/the-practice-of-disobedience>; and "Marguerite Duras on Television," *Another Screen*, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.another-screen.com/marguerite-duras-on-television>.