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“UNA RAGAZZA CHE SI ARRANGIA”**:
NOTES ON THE FILM PRODUCER MARINA PIPERNO

“John Wayne is going to be in it?”
The Indians, too!
“SEND IN THE EXTRAS!”
Jokes aside
You know, the producer is stingy! He gave me only ten!
“Be happy for it!
I only got eight and I gave three of them back!”
A matter of maths?
“Of remainders...”¹

Abstract

The article focuses on the figure and the activity of the producer Marina Piperno. Among the few women who had a leading role in the Italian film industry, Piperno was the sole administrator of the REIAC film production company and produced over two hundred works, including documentaries, industrial films, “caroselli”, fiction films and television dramas. Her professional path can be considered “fuori norma” (non-standard) as it was marked by the need to claim her space not only as a woman in a male-dominated field but also as an independent producer interested in conceiving and implementing production practices alternative to those of mainstream cinema. The article reviews her career path and her approach to film production and then examines the discourses, representations and self-representations concerning Piperno and her professional identity, analysing several sources, including the REIAC collection, publications that gather together the oral testimonies of Piperno and her co-workers, and the biographical documentaries about her and her family history made with Luigi Faccini. The main goal is to investigate how Piperno negotiated, over the course of her career, her status, and her professional identity in relation to her gender and with regard to broader debates about the role of the producer in the Italian film and television industries.

Keywords

Production studies; gender studies; film producers; Italian cinema history; independent cinema.

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** “Sono una ragazza che si arrangia (*I am a Girl Who Makes Do*)”, a collection of poems written by Marina Piperno (La Spezia: Edizioni Cinque Terre, 1999).

¹ M. Piperno, “Dialoghetti,” in *ibid.*, 12. All translations from Italian into English are the author’s, unless otherwise noted.

1. INTRODUCTION

By investigating the case of the producer Marina Piperno, the article examines the complex interweaving between professional and gender identities, the processes of film production and their historical development, the discourses, and the forms of (self)representation through which the actors of the film industry negotiate the perception of their role². The article introduces Piperno and details her work, especially as the sole administrator of the production company REIAC Film (Realizzazioni Indipendenti Autori Cinematografici) and as a “fuori norma” (non-standard) producer – to use the expression coined by Adriano Aprà and recently adopted, in relation to the history of Italian cinema production, by Vito Zagarrìo³. The article then investigates how Piperno has defined and negotiated her role and her professional identity also in relation to her gender – she has been one of the few women to undertake this profession in that period.

Piperno has often defined herself as “the first woman in Italy to produce images”⁴: in truth, although there were pioneer female producers already at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, such as Elvira Notari with her Dora Film⁵, the number of women in the production field, and especially in leading positions, decreased with the rise of fascism and remained decidedly low in the following decades⁶. Examining a dataset of film credits of movies produced and co-produced in Italy between 1949 and 1976, Maria Ida Bernabei has counted less than thirty female producers working in the field⁷. Most of them produced an average of “no more than one film each”, while very few of them, such as Marina Cicogna⁸ and Marina Piperno had a more complex and long-spanning career⁹. Piperno, in particular, produced over two hundred “pieces” – as she and her partner, director Luigi Faccini, call them¹⁰ – in more than fifty years, including documentaries, industrial films, advertising films, fiction films and television dramas.

² This research was supported and funded within the PRIN 2017 Project “Modes, Memories and Cultures of Film Production in Italy (1949-1976)”, <https://cineproduzione.uniud.it> (accessed January 10, 2023). I would also like to thank AAMOD (Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico) and especially Letizia Cortini, for the invaluable help provided for my research, and Marina Piperno for her generosity in discussing several aspects of her professional experience with me.

³ A. Aprà, ed., *Fuori norma. La via sperimentale del cinema italiano (2000-2012)*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2013; V. Zagarrìo, “Modo e modi di produzione. Cinema mainstream e fuori norma 1949-1976”, *L'avventura*, 2021, 75-95.

⁴ M. Piperno, “Lettera di un produttore di sogni,” in AA.VV., *M. Piperno. Produttore di sogni*, Genova: CGS Club Amici del Cinema: 7-11 (10).

⁵ E. Troianelli, *Elvira Notari pioniera del cinema napoletano (1875-1946)*, Rome: Euroma, 1989; M. Dall’Asta, ed., *Non solo dive. Pioniere del cinema italiano*, Bologna: Cineteca, 2008; G. Bruno, *Rovine con vista. Alla ricerca del cinema perduto di Elvira Notari*, Milan: La Tartaruga, 1995. Other female pioneers are mentioned in the ever-expanding database of the project *Women Film Pioneers*, founded by Jane Gaines, Monica Dall’Asta and Radha Vatsal, which maps female labour in the silent film industry. The database sheds light on the work of many unknown pioneers, such as the Italian producer Elvira Giallanella. <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/about/> (accessed January 10, 2023).

⁶ R. Rinaldi, “Produttrici e distributrici nel cinema italiano dagli anni ’30 a oggi”, *Storie in divenire: le donne del cinema italiano*, edited by L. Cardone, C. Jandelli, C. Tognolotti, *Quaderni del CSCI*, 11 (2015): 224-230 (225).

⁷ M.I. Bernabei, “Pioniera senza medaglie. Segretarie di edizione e professioni al femminile nel cinema italiano (1949-1976)”, *Arabeschi*, 18 (2021). Accessed September 10, 2022. <http://www.arabeschi.it/21-pioniera-senza-medaglie-segretarie-di-edizione-e-professioni-al-femminile-nel-cinema-italiano-1949-1976/>.

⁸ On Cicogna’s activity, see M. Giordana, “The Producer’s Roles. La Euro International Films e i fratelli Cicogna attraverso una prima ricognizione delle fonti”, *L'avventura*, 2021: 165-177.

⁹ *Ibid.* The career path and the self-narrative of Cicogna and Piperno, however, are quite different.

¹⁰ Marina Piperno and Luigi Faccini’s website, last accessed January 10, 2023, <http://www.pipernofaccini.com/marina/>.

However, establishing her primacy for chronological reasons or for the number of films she produced is not that relevant. This research, instead, focuses on Piperno's activity as a producer and on the discourses around her gender identity and her professional role, as they seemingly served a precise purpose: that of redefining the producer's role within the industry and its conventional representation. This redefinition was encouraged by the political and cultural context in which she worked, profoundly influenced by those militant instances and film practices developed in the 1960s, which strived towards a re-configuration of film production in a less hierarchical and more collective and participatory sense. Cooperatives and independent productions had a deeply political vision of the cinema and the film industry and argued for a radical change that also involved the role of the producer: to overturn hierarchies and class divides within the industry, it was required to dissolve the equation between producer and master/owner. This hierarchical and unequal labour organization, moreover, was related to the difficulties of women in the film industry in a pioneering survey published by *Bianco & Nero* in 1972 and curated by Cinzia Bellumori. She interviewed several women who worked in the film industry, both in above-the-line and below-the-line roles, including Mara Blasetti, Marina Piperno, Paola Pitagora, Monica Vitti and Suso Cecchi D'Amico, among others. According to Bellumori, the extreme parcelling out of work in the film industry was directly linked to "the issue of women's self-realization"¹¹, and the rigid hierarchical organization determined, for the women interviewed, a condition of "conflict and frustration that depends on the subordinate position of some workers", especially female ones¹². Indeed, as Bellumori observed, there were very few women in leading positions, due to a prejudice against them – women would lack the necessary authority for a leadership role – and due to the scarcity of training opportunities: "that women are unable to carry out this type of work, it is just a cliché: one simply doesn't know how to do what is not taught"¹³.

By running a proudly independent production company, born in this heated political context, Piperno is deeply involved in rethinking the industry hierarchies and the role of the producer. Her figure, however, also problematises the *gendering*¹⁴ of the producer's profession, conventionally considered a male role, above all by virtue of the economic and decision-making power linked to it. The imagery surrounding the producer is definitely male-oriented: producers are often represented as powerful moguls usually accompanied by the diva of the hour (consider, for example, Dino De Laurentiis and Silvana Mangano or Carlo Ponti and Sofia Loren); as efficient businessmen; or as enriched ignoramuses or ruthless swindlers. Piperno's gender identity, I aim to demonstrate, comes into play not only in determining for her those limitations and difficulties she felt as a woman in a leading role, "facing all the masculine knots of decisions, risk, guide, imposition if necessary"¹⁵, but also in stripping her of certain expectations to allow her to reinterpret such a role. To examine how Piperno shaped or contributed to representing her own professional, private, and gender identity all – three are indissolubly connected in the discursive

¹¹ C. Bellumori, ed., "Le donne del cinema contro questo cinema", *Bianco e Nero*, 1-2, 1972: 60.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*: 40. Bellumori's study also focuses on the problem of female education in general, and professional and technical education in particular, highlighting how access to education for women was restricted, especially for high levels of education and specialisation.

¹⁴ The "gendering" of work or a role, as Miranda Banks clarifies, is the way in which "a particular profession may be socially constructed through gender". M.J. Banks, "Gender Below-the-Line. Defining Feminist Production Studies", in *Production Studies. Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, edited by Vicki Mayer, M.J. Banks, J.T. Caldwell, New York: Routledge, 2009: 87-98 (87).

¹⁵ M. Piperno, "Lettera di un produttore di sogni", 10.

production about her – I will refer to a range of sources, adopting a production studies methodology. Production studies combine the interrogation of heterogeneous and usually neglected archival sources – including trade documents for internal use or promotional materials – with written and oral testimonies. Moreover, “at its core” – as Miranda Banks argues – “production studies often resists or complicates traditional power hierarchies, it has its origins in a nonbinary interdisciplinarity, and it has a capacity to highlight cultural inequities”¹⁶: it represents, therefore, a “feminist methodology”¹⁷ especially suitable to shed light on the “fuori norma” figure of Marina Piperno.

The first, fundamental resource for my research is the REIAC collection, held at the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (AAMOD)¹⁸, a foundation aimed at building and nurturing the memory of social movements in Italy by preserving, in particular, audiovisual documents. Donated to AAMOD by Marina Piperno and by the intellectual and film director Ansano Giannarelli – one of the founders of the archive and its president between 1996 and 2004 –, the collection includes many documents related to the cinematographic activity of REIAC film (Realizzazioni Indipendenti Autori Cinematografici), a production company founded in 1962 by Giannarelli himself together with Pietro Nelli, and of which Piperno became, in 1964, the sole administrator. The collection includes many of the REIAC films and several folders with documents concerning the company, its foundation, and its activity: among others, the statutes, some letters promoting the activity of REIAC, materials concerning the “satellite” companies set up to manage some branches of the REIAC business, and many documents related specifically to the production of single films¹⁹.

The writings devoted to Marina Piperno, or both Piperno and her partner, Luigi Faccini, represent another essential source: while the activities of REIAC or Piperno have not been comprehensively discussed in any scholarly study²⁰, a body of works²¹ has attentively analysed the films produced by Piperno and collected precious accounts and statements given by her or by her friends and co-workers. These are extremely useful for understanding Piperno’s work methods and the narratives through which she and others have described and conceptualised her role as a producer²². Besides Piperno’s memories collected in books and other publications, the films with and about her represent another important source. This article considers, in particular, Faccini’s latest films about Piperno and her family, especially *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile* (2009): by documenting Piperno’s daily, mundane life, but also her professional path, this complex film can provide further insights on her image and self-perception. These written and audiovisual memories have been supplemented with interviews which I recently held with the producer.

¹⁶ M. Banks, “Production Studies”, *Feminist Media Histories*, 4, 2 (2018): 157-161 (157).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ My investigation of this collection is ongoing; here I present the first results of a study still underway.

¹⁹ The collection does not cover the whole lifespan of REIAC film, which officially closed in 2002, but covers most of the company’s activity.

²⁰ For a partial reconstruction of the history of the company, and especially of the economic and organizational aspects, see G. Contenti, “Analisi di un’impresa cinematografica: la Reiac srl”, Dissertation, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, a.a. 2009/2010.

²¹ Such as AA.VV., *M. Piperno. Produttore di sogni*, or AA.VV., *Marina Piperno & Luigi M. Faccini. Un film lungo 50 anni*, Rome: Fondazione Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, 2014.

²² Furthermore, Piperno and Faccini in February 2023 published a book dedicated to the life and activity of Piperno, *Eppure qualcosa ho visto sotto il sole*. The volume, the most comprehensive one written so far by and about her, will include several archival photographs of the Piperno family and of the producer’s professional activity.

2. MARINA PIPERNO: THE REIAC YEARS AND BEYOND

I will first present a brief overview of Piperno's activity as a producer, in order to outline her professional path and her approach to cinema, as well as to restore, at least in some measure, the richness of a largely forgotten production. I will then move to analyse the discourses and strategies of (self)representation concerning her professional and gender identity.

Unlike other female professionals in relevant production roles within the cinema industry (such as Marina Cicogna, Mara Blasetti or Bianca Lattuada, among others), Marina Piperno did not come from a family of film industry workers: her father, Simone Piperno, was a Jewish fabric retailer. She was born in 1935, during the Fascist Era and three years before the Racial Laws. Of her childhood, Piperno remembers the sense of isolation, the fear, and the hiding²³. Her family memories have always been entrusted to images: the Piperno family archive is full of photographs and even amateur films, such as the 16mm footage of Marina's parents' wedding in 1933²⁴. The testimonial value of the images, along with the need to constantly question, problematise and redefine their meaning, becomes one of the key aspects of Piperno's productions.

In her twenties, after a brief and precocious career as a journalist, and after a stay in the United States in which, among other things, she attended a course in film directing, Piperno made her debut as a producer in 1961, with *16 Ottobre 1943*, directed by Ansano Giannarelli, her husband at the time. The film tells the story of the SS raid in the Ghetto of Rome, which caused the deportation of more than a thousand Jewish citizens to concentration camps. This work, financed with the help of her father Simone, already indicated the trajectory of Piperno's professional career: from that moment on, she committed to producing a cinema of civil, political engagement – *16 Ottobre 1943* is exemplary of a renewed anti-fascist spirit that permeated Italian cinema in the 1960s²⁵ – marked also by experimentation and hybridization of formal strategies²⁶. Furthermore, the partnership with Giannarelli constitutes, together with that with Faccini, Piperno's most significant collaboration – and in both cases, there is a personal as well as a professional relationship between them.

The following year, together with Giannarelli and Pietro Nelli, Piperno founded REIAC film, a production company that was active for forty years. Because of its longevity, REIAC witnessed a number of critical transformations in the Italian audiovisual industries. The company adapted to those changes by diversifying its production, while at the same time maintaining overall coherent methods and values: the independence of its authors, the making of a politically engaged but non-dogmatic cinema, the interest in new technologies and formal experimentation, the adoption of flexible production methods, and a low-budget approach.

In the 1960s, REIAC mainly balanced the production of personal projects with that of industrial and educational films, advertising films and “caroselli”, made to secure some profits: films such as *Biografia di un aereo* (Giannarelli and Nelli, 1964), for Fiat –

²³ To avoid being deported, her family took on a false surname, Pistolesi, for two years. See Piperno, “Lettera di un produttore di sogni”: 7.

²⁴ The footage has also been included in *Diaspora* and *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

²⁵ As argued by film critic and historian Mino Argentieri, who wrote the screenplay of *16 Ottobre 1943*. M. Argentieri, “Il cinema nell’Italia del centrosinistra”, in *Storia del cinema italiano. Vol. X – 1960/1964*, edited by G. De Vincenti, Venezia: Marsilio, 2003: 182.

²⁶ See A. Medici, *Il cinema saggistico di Ansano Giannarelli*, Turin: Lindau 2011, 64–65.

awarded at the fifth edition of the Festival del film industriale in Bologna – *Green Light* (Giannarelli and Nelli, 1965), for ENI, *SOS Neurochirurgico*, again by Giannarelli and Nelli (1965), for Pfizer; or the Facis, Omsa and Upim “caroselli” (1968-1970)²⁷. These commissioned works, which the REIAC authors made without completely renouncing their style, allowed the company to finance more personal projects, especially documentaries, for cinema and television. The documentaries on Africa made between 1966 and 1968 and directed by Giannarelli and Nelli – *Diario di bordo*, *L’asfalto nella giungla*, *Il bianco e il nero*, *Dakar è una metropoli*, *Noi siamo l’Africa*, *Tokende!*, *Labanta negro* – are examples of such projects²⁸.

During the 1960s, Piperno produced one of the most notable works by REIAC, a film she is especially proud of²⁹: *Sierra Maestra* (1969). *Sierra Maestra* is the byproduct of the collaborative instances that found legitimacy with Law n. 1213 of 1965, the so-called “Corona Law”, and in particular with art. 28, that established “a special fund for films inspired by artistic and cultural aims made with a production formula that provides for the participation in the production costs of authors, directors, actors and workers”³⁰. The film was produced thanks to this funding opportunity and belongs to what many define as the “golden age” of article 28, the second half of the 1960s, in which such funds guaranteed results of a remarkable quality³¹. The documents of the REIAC archive include the contracts and agreements of profit-sharing stipulated by the company for the film, not only with the director and above-the-line workers but also with below-the-line professionals, such as the assistant director Giuseppe Bellecca or the cinematographer Marcello Gatti, in full compliance with the collective spirit at the foundation of REIAC³². Piperno, however, took the highest risk: when she went to Banca Nazionale del Lavoro to obtain the credit, she was asked to personally guarantee its repayment. With a small crew ready to film in Venezuela, Piperno gave in to this request that, as the producer herself recalled on several occasions³³, forced her to pay the debt for twenty years: she was one of the few who repaid a credit basically considered non-repayable³⁴.

Thanks to the awards and the critical attention surrounding *Sierra Maestra*, during the 1970s REIAC intensified the collaboration with the public broadcasting

²⁷ The industrial films commissioned to REIAC represented also a great opportunity to develop the theme of work, which was of great interest to many REIAC directors, above all Ansano Giannarelli, as films such as *Profilo di un operaio* (1964), *Diario di bordo*, *Sabato domenica e lunedì* (1968), *Analisi del lavoro* (1972), *Linea di montaggio* (1972) or *Mani nere* (1973) demonstrate. S. Savorelli, “La paziente arte di sperimentare. I film sul lavoro di Ansano Giannarelli”, in *Cercando la rivoluzione*, edited by A. Medici, Rome: Donzelli, 2013: 103-118.

²⁸ Almost all of them are directed by Giannarelli, except for *Diario di bordo*, directed by both Giannarelli and Nelli, and *Labanta negro*, directed by Nelli. For a detailed analysis of these works and of the collaboration between Nelli and Giannarelli, see Medici, *Il cinema saggistico di Ansano Giannarelli*, 83-118.

²⁹ Piperno, “Lettera di un produttore di sogni”: 10.

³⁰ *Gazzetta ufficiale*, November 12, 1965, accessed January 10, 2023. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1965-11-12&atto.codiceRedazionale=065U1213&elenco30giorni=false

³¹ V. Zagarrò, “Dal ‘28’ al ‘68: l’età d’oro di un fondo particolare”, in *Storia del cinema italiano*. Vol. XI – 1965/1969, edited by G. Canova, Venice: Marsilio, 2002: 429.

³² REIAC collection, Film e programmi, *Sierra Maestra*, Faldone UA3, Materiali fase progettazione produttiva e definizione di risorse, Fascicolo 1.

³³ The episode is recalled, for example, in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

³⁴ A late integration to art. 28, promulgated on 23 July 1980 (*Gazzetta ufficiale*, July 31, 1980). Accessed January 10, 2023, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1980/07/31/080U0379/sg>, established once and for all that the failure to return the credit could be compensated by transferring the film negative and the rights of the film to the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia.

company RAI, making works such as *Ragioniamo col cervello*, a study in six episodes by Giannarelli (1971); some films made for “gli Sperimentali”, curated by Mario Raimondo and Italo Moscati, between 1969 and 1970 (*La traversata*, by Beppe Bellecca, *Il desiderio di diventare pellerossa*, by Roberto Alemanno and Francesco Calderone, and *L’Alessandro nelle Indie*, by Vittorio Sermonti); the five-episode film series *Uomini della scienza*, supervised by Giannarelli and Lombardo Radice (1977). REIAC, therefore, benefitted from a peculiar phase in the history of RAI, as the national broadcasting company fostered, in the 1970s, the production of films by first time or little experienced directors, and favoured auteur cinema³⁵. REIAC also continued to produce industrial films and theatrical fiction films such as *Il Fratello*, by Massimo Mida (1974).

The most relevant production of the 1970s is *Non ho tempo* (1973), a television film about the mathematician Evariste Galois, directed by Giannarelli for RAI. The numerous documents related to the production of the film in the AAMOD archive demonstrate that Giannarelli and Piperno did not want to produce a theatrical film with television funding, but rather to fully harness the potential of television as a medium, structuring the narrative and language of their project accordingly. In particular, the intention was to divide *Non ho tempo* into episodes, a desire expressed by Giannarelli, but also fully supported by Piperno: “We proposed to shoot *Non ho tempo* as a three-episode program” – wrote, in December 1970, Marina Piperno to Edoardo Sanguineti, screenwriter of the film together with Giannarelli:

This is because there is a lot of material that needs to be developed in the appropriate time-span; and we are also convinced that seriality is one of the main features of television: films like Bertolucci’s *La strategia del ragno* – aired a few weeks ago – are immediately forgotten precisely because of the atypical way in which they are broadcast³⁶.

Despite an initial refusal from RAI, Giannarelli and Piperno were finally granted permission to make a three-hour version of *Non ho tempo*, to be aired in three episodes, along with a theatrical version of about an hour and forty, especially since Piperno managed to keep costs down. For a long time, the theatrical version was the only one that circulated: the three-episode version was stalled by RAI and aired, after a long battle, only in 1977³⁷. Such a troubled distribution was a recurring issue in the history of Piperno as a producer, due to the political engagement of the authors she worked with and the limited commercial appeal of the films. The case of *Non ho tempo*, nonetheless, demonstrates once again that REIAC was a company whose producer and filmmakers were prone to explore other media besides cinema, and to resort to both technical and aesthetic solutions that allowed them to preserve their autonomy and, at the same time, to reduce production costs³⁸.

During the 1980s, REIAC continued along the same path of experimentation: in

³⁵ V. Zagarrò, *L’anello mancante. Storia e teoria del rapporto cinema-televisione*, Turin: Lindau, 2004, 149-182; G. Barlozzetti, F. Pinto, C. Salizzato, *La televisione presenta... La produzione cinematografica della Rai, 1965-1975*, Venice: Marsilio, 1988.

³⁶ M. Piperno, Lettera a Edoardo Sanguineti del 22 dicembre 1970, REIAC collection, Film e programmi, *Non ho tempo*, Faldone UA3, Materiali fasi progettazione creativa e progettazione produttiva, Fascicolo 4.

³⁷ A. Medici, *Il cinema saggistico di Aniano Giannarelli*, 234-235.

³⁸ So much so that REIAC equipped itself, internally, with an Institute for Audiovisual Technologies Research (IRTAV) that conducted research and studies on less expensive technologies, such as video tapes and video recorders.

1982, Piperno produced for RAI *La Verità*, by Cesare Zavattini. This was another challenging production: it was the first film as a director for the eighty-year-old Zavattini, “an existential and political happening that escapes any genre definition”³⁹ and weighed entirely on Zavattini’s shoulders, engaging him in a *tour de force* that was also risky for the producer, since no insurance company was willing to insure Zavattini due to his age. But Piperno persisted because she considered him a mentor and a master: “Cesare Zavattini is a very special chapter in my life as a producer and as a human being... I did my best to allow him to stage the ‘truth’ which commercial cinema would have never allowed him to stage and to tell”⁴⁰.

In these years, REIAC was affected by the crisis of the industry that marked the 1980s: the contraction of the audience determined a decrease in production investments, while the role of television networks in financing film productions became increasingly important. The end of the RAI monopoly and the liberalisation of private local broadcasting, nevertheless, determined a fierce competition between RAI and Fininvest, as both wanted to invest in the production and the rights acquisition of successful films⁴¹. In such a context, middlebrow, low-risk cinema prevailed⁴², thus leaving little room for more eccentric productions. The collaboration between REIAC and RAI continued despite these difficulties⁴³; conversely, due to the widespread diffusion of video technologies, which made it more convenient for businesses to rely on small local companies, the demand for industrial films and advertising films decreased⁴⁴.

Giannarelli limited his work for REIAC; the marriage between him and Piperno had already ended during the making of *Non ho tempo*. In the meantime, at the end of the 1970s Piperno established a second, fundamental personal and professional partnership with Luigi Faccini. Faccini, a film critic (he was one of the founders of *Cinema & Film*) and director since the end of the 1960s, met Piperno after he had directed his debut film *Niente di meno niente di più* (1970) for the RAI “gli Sperimentali”, which was followed by *Garofano rosso* (1976); he had also carried out long research work in the asylum of Arezzo as well as founded the Filmcoop cooperative. After Faccini’s resignation from Filmcoop, in 1980 the couple began a long-lasting professional collaboration that led them to found, in 1982, the production company MP, which operated at the same time as REIAC until the end of the 1990s⁴⁵.

From the Faccini-Piperno collaboration, one should at least mention the anthropological investigation documentaries such as *Sassalbo, provincia di Sidney* (1981) or *L’Amiata è anche un fiume* (1983); *Inganni* (1985), a biopic about Dino Campana whose development dated back to the years spent by Faccini in the asylum in Arezzo, that became one of the filming locations; *Donna d’ombra* (1988), a woman’s film about death and grieving inspired by the death of Piperno’s beloved father; the diptych *Notte di stelle* (1992) and *Giamaica* (1998), suburban tales that combine reality and fiction. Faccini’s

³⁹ S. Parigi, “La Verità di Zavattini”, in *Storia del cinema italiano. Vol. XIII-1977/1985*, edited by V. Zagario, Venice: Marsilio, 2005: 240.

⁴⁰ Piperno’s memory as recounted in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

⁴¹ B. Corsi, *Produzione e produttori*, Milan: Il Castoro, 2012, 42-47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴³ Both Piperno and Giannarelli identify the political context and corruption caused by the interference of the PSI in the administration of RAI as responsible for the subsequent deterioration of their relationship with the broadcasting company. See their interviews in G. Contenti, “Analysis of a film company”.

⁴⁴ Interview with Ansano Giannarelli, in *ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁵ Refer to the couple’s biography in AA.VV., *Marina Piperno & Luigi M. Faccini. Un film lungo 50 anni*, 7-21.

“impure”⁴⁶ and “non-standard”⁴⁷ cinema found in Piperno its possibility of existence, thanks to her ability to work with reduced budgets for the realization of projects that cannot hope for great revenues.

Both REIAC and MP dissolved at the beginning of the 2000s, but the couple continue their professional and personal partnership. The growing difficulties in realising their projects did not discourage them. The urgency of filming led Faccini to use lightweight, cheaper cameras (such as prosumer cameras and GoPros) that allowed him to work on a very low budget: his cinema of the 2000s is a cinema made with modest means, almost homemade⁴⁸. It is also an intimate cinema, a dialogue between him and Piperno, who becomes the protagonist or the narrator of films such as *Diaspora* (2014), *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*, *Rudolph Jacobs, l'uomo che nacque morendo* (2011) and *Giro di boa* (2019). In these films, the camera accompanies her as she retraces her personal and family memory, reflects on the traumas of history, and hands her experience over to future generations.

3. PRODUTTRICE OR “PRODUTTORE DONNA”? THE COMPLEX IDENTITY OF MARINA PIPERNO

This final section examines Piperno’s (self)representation and (self)reflection to understand how she perceived her role as a producer and a woman working in the industry. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to consider her own discourses, but also to *look through* other people’s stories on her, and especially those told by her partners, Giannarelli and Faccini. Giannarelli’s understanding of the goals and modes of production of REIAC film and his political and aesthetic views as both an author and a partner of the company is prevalent in the REIAC collection, as the vast majority of the notes and documents of the collection belonged to him. This inevitably overshadows Piperno’s presence. As Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight, among others, have observed, this is a very common condition when studying female figures in film production: “many women have left few historical traces, their roles in production or film culture obscured by more publicly visible or self-promotional male partners or concealed behind collective or collaborative practices”⁴⁹. Nonetheless, the documents of the REIAC collection provide important insights into her approach to work. Similarly, Piperno’s recent film portraits are mediated by Faccini’s gaze, and yet the producer is also, for all intents and purposes, their co-author.

The relative “absence” of Piperno from the REIAC papers, after all, matches the profile of a present and yet discreet producer, who believed that her task was above all to make possible the material conditions necessary for the realisation of the projects and the vision of the REIAC authors: “please don’t think of this word as too big: but I have always considered myself the *strategist* of the company, without ever crushing authors or collaborators, but rather putting myself *at the service* of their creativity”⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ L. Barisone, “Una meteora devastante”, in *Marina Piperno & Luigi Faccini. Un film lungo 50 anni*, 212-217 (213).

⁴⁷ Faccini is one of the “fuori norma” authors indicated by Adriano Aprà. See Aprà, ed., *Fuori norma. La via sperimentale del cinema italiano (2000-2012)*.

⁴⁸ This body of works is produced by the cultural association Ippogrifo Liguria.

⁴⁹ “Introduction”, in *Doing Women’s Film History. Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, edited by C. Gledhill, J. Knight, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015: 1-12 (4).

⁵⁰ Emphasis added by the author. Piperno, “Lettera di un produttore di sogni”: 10.

The documents related to the pre-production and the shooting of works such as *Sierra Maestra* and *Non ho tempo* demonstrate the high degree of autonomy with which Giannarelli worked, especially while filming. Piperno has often confessed that she disliked being on set; rather, she concentrated her energies and her work on raising money and organizing production according to the budget:

I would never distinguish the term producer from that of unit production manager, at least in my specific case, because in the kind of work that I do, making a certain type of film [...] quality is essential. There is, therefore, a great amount of preproduction work, that not only entails producing a film, but organising it too. [...] I know this might sound peculiar, because other producers have their own production managers, and perhaps this is the reason why I make two films in three years instead of twenty or ten, because I handle both production and organisation at the same time⁵¹.

Her method, however, was also tailored to the needs of the authors she worked with. By way of example, during the shooting of *La Veritàaaa* her presence on set was constant:

I spent the whole day on set, I believe I have never been on set like that before, because I never enjoyed it, I have always liked, when producing, organising preproduction, searching for funding, instead that time with Zavattini I was on set all day because I wanted to be close to him, basically, I did not want to leave him alone, it seemed to me that he needed the producer to be close to him all the time and no matter what⁵².

Piperno's preference for production management also shines through in her description of the work in an independent production company as a stimulating challenge. She claims to wear the nickname she earned in the industry, “the queen of low budget”, with pride:

Low budget does not imply approximation, quite the opposite. Making a film with a low budget means obsessively analysing the project beforehand, over and over, analysing everything that is needed so that the film can be wrapped up without budget issues. It means having your collaborators involved – I remember having these obsessive meetings, obsessive for them, not for me, because I tried to give them control of the various parts of the film, something that in my opinion was absolutely necessary for the film to be done without exceeding the budget. A producer must be careful not to go over budget. I have always worked meticulously, like a goldsmith, I tried to mend all the stretch marks like a *knitter*, like a *seamstress* with her own thread, and I spent a lot of time on budgeting before starting the film, I estimated production costs, I reread the script, I talked to the director, I examined all the economic solutions that were the most suitable for the film and also for our budget. Making a film with a low budget is definitely more difficult than making a film with a high budget, that is, with a lot of money⁵³.

The documents in the REIAC collection confirm Piperno's cooperation with the directors to find a balance between their creative needs and the films' budget. Her commitment to raising money and finding clients for the company was constant: during REIAC's first years, she was always busy, together with Nelli and Giannarelli, making contacts with companies of various kinds, even with really small businesses, to promote the activity of REIAC in the field of industrial film, internal training films or advertising. In this respect,

⁵¹ Interview with Piperno in Bellumori, ed., “Le donne del cinema contro questo cinema”, 69.

⁵² Memory shared by Piperno in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

⁵³ Emphasis added by the author. M. Piperno in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

the collection also confirms something that has already been observed about producers' archives in general: "sifting through a producer's archive one is often struck by the sheer volume of letters asking for money; and the volume of rejections calls to mind Winston Churchill's definition of success: 'stumbling from failure to failure without any loss of enthusiasm'"⁵⁴.

For Piperno, organising the work is a process in which creativity translates into "the ability, so necessary for independent producers, of securing funds for a project by manipulating markets, negotiating deals, pre-selling and all the other elements of a complex financial package without which a film could not be made"⁵⁵. Furthermore, when she defines herself as the "enabler" of other people's creativity, she confirms a certain rhetoric of self-representation that is typical for above-the-line professionals working on quality productions with a strong collective dimension⁵⁶. Such a narrative is also the result of the demands for collectivism that arose in the 1960s within the film industry, which encouraged the redefinition of the producer's role and asked for a truly collective production. Since her activity was strongly connected to this *milieu*, Piperno worked hard to differentiate herself from the more conventional image of the producer as the owner and to mark her distance from more mainstream productions and their methods. It is indicative in this sense that REIAC and its partners not only never joined ANICA, the Italian film industry trade association, but rather opposed it.

The position of ANICA's president, Eitel Monaco, regarding cooperativism or autonomous production groups, after all, was very clear:

The protesters, generally over-benefiting from the consumer economy, do not want to work with the producers because they think they exploit the law of profit. [...] They have therefore made up groups of authors, artists and technicians to produce autonomously while being community-funded, under the guidance of a new type of professional figure, the cultural organiser. Such proposals cannot be taken seriously⁵⁷.

Conversely, on the pages of the militant magazine *Questo cinema*, REIAC is described as one of the few companies to promote an idea of collective cinema of high artistic and cultural value, and for which "the producer [...] transforms into a cultural organiser who works not to impose his creative will (a mediation of the laws of the market) but to identify himself with the premises and the direction freely chosen by the authors"⁵⁸. Piperno and REIAC proudly represented themselves as an alternative to the highly hierarchical and institutionalised system of film and media production. The company's documents emphasise the fact that Piperno considered herself different from the producer as it is commonly understood. As explained in a company profile: "Marina Piperno, who is the sole administrator of the company, has been working for some time now as producer and production manager. Today, using a buzzword, she would be called a *cultural operator*"⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ A. Spicer, A.T. McKenna, C. Meir, "Introduction", in *Beyond the Bottom Line. The Producer in Film and Television Studies*, edited by A. Spicer, A.T. McKenna, C. Meir, London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2014: 1-23 (6).

⁵⁵ Spicer, McKenna, Meir, "Introduction", 13.

⁵⁶ J.T. Caldwell, *Production Culture. Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2008, 202.

⁵⁷ Monaco's declaration has been reported in an anonymous article of *Questo cinema*, November 6, 1968. REIAC collection, Film e programmi, *Sierra Maestra*, Faldone UA12, Rassegna stampa.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Emphasis added by the author. REIAC presentation document from 1972, REIAC collection, Attività

By presenting herself as a “fuori norma” producer, Piperno wanted to distance herself from the ‘others’, whom she called “cinematografari”⁶⁰. During the pre-production of *Sierra Maestra*, Gian Maria Volonté, who had initially agreed to play the main role, left the project at the last minute plausibly causing economic damage to REIAC: the withdrawal of his name from the project was an issue both for the funding and the distribution of the film⁶¹. However, Piperno sent him a letter declaring that she did not want to make any legal claim against him because “we do not belong to ‘normal’ cinema, where this would perhaps be considered normal”⁶². At the end of June 1968, when Volonté’s withdrawal was confirmed, Piperno wrote to Bino Cicogna, who was interested in distributing the film with Euro paying a “minimum guarantee” because of Volonté’s participation, and kindly declined his offer, justifying the change of the leading actor as an artistic choice made by Giannarelli⁶³. Volonté, for his part, left the project without consequences, while the actor’s decision not to take part in *Metti, una sera a cena* (Giuseppe Patroni Griffi, 1969) right at the beginning of production led to a severe official stance from the Unione Nazionale Produttori⁶⁴ and a controversy with the production company of the film, Euro International, that could only be resolved with a new agreement between him and Marina Cicogna.

Piperno was well aware of the position of weakness in which independent producers found themselves operating, and of the need to find a way to defend their collective interests. Therefore, together with a group of producers, including Mario Gallo and Filippo Bandini, she contributed to the foundation of APICET (Association of Independent Film and Television Producers), of which she was nominated vice-president together with Roberto Levi. Although this was a short-lived experience, it demonstrates how actively engaged she was in redefining the professional role of the producer. One of APICET’s goals, as a draft of the programmatic platform states, was formally that of

rejecting the image, which circulates superficially in many contexts, of the role of the producer as exclusively charged with negative meanings, automatically identified with that of the owner or as a simple executor of financial deals: this implies an unacceptable underestimation of the promotional and organisational function of the audiovisual production process⁶⁵.

Giannarelli’s response to Piperno’s desire for REIAC to join APICET, however, is quite telling:

For you, this is about getting out of that isolation that you have felt and denounced for years. It is also about being more politically engaged than before. [...] In my opinion, despite your

istituzionale, organizzativa e amministrativa, Comunicazione, promozione e corrispondenza, Faldone 03.

⁶⁰ A derogatory term to indicate people in the film industry. See Piperno’s interview in G. Ganino, “L’opera di Ansano Giannarelli”, M.A. diss., Università di Bologna, a.a. 1996/1997, 7.

⁶¹ See M. Piperno, Letter to Gian Maria Volonté, June 11, 1968, REIAC collection, Film e Programmi, *Sierra Maestra*, Faldone UA2, Materiali fase progettazione produttiva e definizione risorse, Fascicolo 1).

⁶² Piperno, Letter to Gian Maria Volonté.

⁶³ M. Piperno, Letter to Bino Cicogna, June 27, 1968, REIAC collection, Film e Programmi, *Sierra Maestra*, Faldone UA2, Materiali fase progettazione produttiva e definizione risorse, Fascicolo 1.

⁶⁴ “Il Consiglio produttori sul caso Volonté”, in *Cinema d’oggi*, 39, October 14, 1968: 4.

⁶⁵ A. Giannarelli, “APICET. Piattaforma Programmatica” (ca. May 1978), REIAC collection, Attività istituzionale, organizzativa e amministrativa - 1977/1986, Faldone 02. The document is drafted by Giannarelli, after some consultations between him and Piperno, but they likely agreed on this matter as well as on most of the content. Piperno has made similar comments in several interviews during the years.

political inexperience, your partial production experience, your lack of in-depth analysis on various problems, *your position as a woman*, you are ‘newer’ than Gallo⁶⁶.

Besides the harsh honesty and a slightly patronising tone, what is striking in Giannarelli’s words is the reference to being a woman as a condition of disadvantage. There is, indeed, a certain ambivalence in the way in which the gender identity of the producer is perceived by herself and by others, and also in the way her gender relates to her professional identity, contributing to the definition of the latter.

On the one hand, despite her temperament and resolutions, not even Piperno escaped a certain rhetoric of leadership as strength and command. The producer herself, or those who knew her and were asked to describe her work, seemed to feel, on several occasions, the need to be reassuring about her professionalism by using metaphors or adjectives conventionally associated with the sphere of masculinity. Piperno herself, as we saw earlier, says she had to face “the masculine knots of decisions” with “*impositività*” [imposition]; Citto Maselli describes her as “the soul or the war machine”⁶⁷ of REI-AC, contrasting a delicate metaphor with a ‘warlike’ one and conveying the impression of her ‘implacable’ method. For the Argentine director Fernando Birri, the struggle is not even metaphorical anymore:

I remember you, so well, fighting for everything, big or small, to solve it in the best way. And when I say fighting, I mean fighting, not in a metaphorical way but in a concrete way (and you will remember, I hope, also some verbal fights between the two of us [...]). So – oh, *brave!* – to your credit, I repeat, to your *determination*, to your *firmness*, to your *consistency*, to your *stubbornness*, to your *provocation* [...]. And of course, I acknowledge all the work, so much work, and more work, work, work, that you did and that you made us do *without mercy*, neither for you nor for anyone else⁶⁸.

Before listing Piperno’s qualities, however, Birri raises the issue of gender declension of her profession when wondering if he should address her as “produttrice” or “produttore donna”⁶⁹. The use of the over-extended masculine, also adopted in the title of the volume that includes Birri’s statement, and even used by Piperno on several occasions, suggests a certain reluctance in using a feminine noun for an almost exclusively male role, as if the feminine declension could diminish its importance. In describing Piperno, Patrizia Pistagnesi conversely puts her gender identity before the professional one, “great woman, great producer”, and then defines her as “creative and *welcoming*”⁷⁰, the latter an adjective more usually associated with the domestic and private sphere, conventionally associated with the feminine.

Piperno has also constructed a different image of herself, for which her gender identity constitutes a strength, instead of a weakness, and a central element from which to conceptualize her role and her productive practice. This aspect emerges above all in the reflections conveyed in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*. In the film, which is at the same time a portrait of her everyday life, a dialogue with her partner

⁶⁶ Emphasis added by the author. A. Giannarelli, Lettera a Marina Piperno, 22 marzo 1978, collection, Attività istituzionale, organizzativa e amministrativa, Comunicazione, promozione e corrispondenza, Faldone 03.

⁶⁷ C. Maselli in *Cercando la rivoluzione*: 99.

⁶⁸ Emphasis added by the author. F. Birri, in *M. Piperno. Produttore di sogni*, 20.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Though “welcoming” doesn’t fully translate the nuances of the Italian “accogliente”. P. Pistagnesi in *Cercando la rivoluzione*: 31-33 (32).

Luigi, and a memoir based on archival images (home movies, film stills and excerpts, set photographs) Piperno proves to be “fuori norma” also in constructing her image. It is an image that does not deny the private, personal dimension but rather puts it in the foreground, highlighting aspects of domestic work and care usually absent in more conventional portraits of businesswomen. In the film, we see her sweeping the floors, cooking, washing the dishes, and working in the garden, having allowed her partner to film her while doing household chores. The domestic space, however, also becomes a space for intellectual and creative activities, such as writing, reading, painting, and listening to music. Indeed, she presents herself as “creative and welcoming”. This intimate portrait is distant from the film producers’ image conventionally conveyed by documentaries, which often underline their entrepreneurial acumen, brilliant intuition, or heroic battles to realize their vision. It is also different from the representation of another female producer, Marina Cicogna, in the documentary *Marina Cicogna, La vita e tutto il resto*: the elegant and aristocratic figure of Cicogna appears composed and detached, while the archival materials show her in control and perfectly at ease in the international jet set or with the people in the industry.

The exposure of herself and her weaknesses is not easy for Piperno, so much so that at the beginning of the film she complains about the “loss of [her] freedom” and tells her partner: “I’m cold, I’m tired, I would like to be left alone”. Moreover, for a woman like Piperno, who declared that she went to the United States when she was young to escape the fate of many women of her generation (meaning marriage and children), the choice of showing herself dedicated to care work within the domestic space may seem counterintuitive. However, that of care, and specifically of maternal care, is another of the metaphors through which Piperno conceives her work as a producer:

I have always said they [the films] were my children, I looked after them, I pampered them, I kept them with me. I did not have children because I had films. Since I started in the 1960s I felt satisfied by this work, it fascinated me, because seeing a film, a documentary, a project being born from nothing, is very gratifying [...] it is like raising a child⁷¹.

The metaphor of production as *reproduction* and care is not new. Lita Stantic, the well-known Argentine producer of authors such as Lucrecia Martel, in discussing her work often refers to a quotation (that she attributes to Michel Chion) according to which the mother of the film, that is “the main creative force” behind its making, is the director, whereas the producer is the father of the film⁷². Undoubtedly, the type of metaphor chosen by Stantic may depend on the fact that she mainly collaborated with female directors, while Piperno produced films directed by men, establishing the most abiding professional bonds with two men to whom she was/is also romantically involved. In this respect, her conceptualisation of the producer’s work as caregiving and as a substitute for maternity has an ambiguous nature: on the one hand, it could be read as bringing her profession back into a patriarchal order in which care work is entrusted to the woman behind the scenes, while the limelight belongs to the man on stage; an order in which a ‘lack’ of the female subject, the rejection of the reproductive maternal role, must be balanced with metaphorical childbirth and care⁷³.

⁷¹ *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

⁷² C. Grant, “The Cultural Saliency of an Argentine Female Film Producer,” paper presented at the Latin American Women Filmmakers on the Global Stage, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, May 10, 2013; C. Burucúa, “Lita Stantic: Auteur Producer/Producer of Auteurs”, in *Beyond the Bottom Line*: 215-228 (221).

⁷³ See Piperno’s honest interview about her choice of being childfree in the web archive of the project *Lunadigas*, <https://www.lunadigas.com/archivio/marina-piperno-cinema/>. Accessed January 10, 2023.

On the other hand, this ‘feminisation’ of the producer’s work, also expressed on other occasions, (for instance, when she compared her job to other gendered professions such as that of *magliaia* [knitter] and *cucitrice* [seamstress]) – is also accompanied, for Piperno, by a precise political vision: the desire to overthrow the hierarchies and power dynamics of labour within the film industry. One could argue, therefore, that this feminisation is almost a radical gesture, one that, by bringing to the fore the importance of caregiving, removes the production role from male domination and ‘feminises’ it, not to diminish its importance but, if anything, to reimagine it as a practice that could generate not only films (‘babies’), but also new professional kinships. The reproductive metaphor also relates to her desire to pass on her memory and legacy. The dedication with which the producer and her partner have re-tied the threads of her family memories and reconstructed family links, compiling books and catalogues of their activity almost obsessively, is a manifestation not only of their desire to remember but also to be remembered, to ensure that their work and commitment are not forgotten⁷⁴.

As this article has demonstrated, Marina Piperno’s work as a producer is worth being remembered for several reasons. Her career stands out as unique in the Italian scene for her professional path’s longevity, articulation, and coherence. Retracing her positioning at the margins of the film industry also reveals key labour shifts in the history of film production in Italy: the introduction of art. 28 in 1965 and the financing of cultural and artistic films whose costs were shared by above- and below-the-line workers; the examples of cooperativism; the position of the main trade associations and the foundation of APICET as an alternative to ANICA for independent producers; the role of broadcasting networks in producing films and documentaries between the 1970s and 1980s.

Furthermore, the self-narrative she constructed over the years, especially in the last period of her activity, is aimed at removing the producer’s work not only from the conventional professional hierarchies within the film industry but also from the male domination that characterises a strongly gendered role. This is despite the inevitable contradictions that surface in a personal and professional path so closely linked to the male figures of Giannarelli and Faccini. It is also worth considering that Piperno’s political engagement was not accompanied, as she confirmed during our interview, by an involvement with feminist movements, with which she had no contact. As Gledhill and Knight have rightly pointed out, there may be a “fracture, between feminist perspectives now and the perspectives within which our historical subjects worked”⁷⁵; nonetheless, a careful analysis of Piperno’s figure “may gesture to future conditions and perspectives” different from those that constrained someone like Piperno, therefore alerting us “to the blind spots lurking in our contemporary imaginaries”⁷⁶.

Even though Piperno and others like her who dreamed of a different industry remained marginal, her legacy goes beyond the considerable body of work she produced, and should not be underestimated. Her work and her constant attempts to push the boundaries of the producer’s role may serve as a reminder that the battles for gender equality within the film industry cannot be separated from a more general rethinking of the modes and structures of work in the creative industries and may hopefully inspire new forms and new practices of resistance.

⁷⁴ This paper cannot discuss at any length the aspects of Piperno’s Jewish identity. However, as she and her partner recalled on several occasions, this urge to recover, preserve, and pass on memories to the next generations could be strongly related to the experience of having her right to life denied under the Fascist regime, and having to give up her identity, as a child, in order to survive.

⁷⁵ Gledhill, Knight, *Introduction*, 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*