‘Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers’: Love and unknowing in Alina Marazzi’s *Un’Ora sola ti vorrei [For One More Hour with You]* (2002)

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**Abstract:**

In her first documentary film, *For One More Hour With You* (2002), Alina Marazzi explores ways of using cinema, and in particular carefully edited found footage, to attend to sensory presence, to girlhood, to female sexuality, to sensuality and love. Marazzi’s work is sensitive to ways in which cinema may conjure another individual as sensate and animate, as affectively and erotically present, as touched, elated and damaged. Yet her work is also finely attuned to protection and to ethical delicacy, forging a responsive sensibility, reminding us of all that we also don’t know of each other. Her focus on her mother Liseli Hoepli Marazzi, on her loves, on the moves from girlhood into more charged erotic and affective experience, is part of a broader feminist agenda. Marazzi’s work encourages viewers to feel, to attend to sensation, whilst remaining uncertain of what is seen or heard.

**Keywords:** Alina Marazzi, Adriana Cavarero, Lynne Huffer, Mothers, Daughters, Mourning
'I told you I love you and yet I don’t know a thing about you’,

Liseli Hoepli Marazzi cited by Alina Marazzi

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In her book, Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures, Lynne Huffer writes: ‘How does a daughter write about or even to a mother without consigning the mother to the absence, invisibility and silence on which a certain conception of writing traditionally depends?’¹ I am interested here in the possibilities of representing a mother on film, of pursuing a loving relation to her through sound and moving images even in her apparent absence. Huffer’s question involves issues of the possible close identification between mother and daughter, of the loving, identity-involving, and shifting, intimacy of maternal/filial affection, filiation. It opens to a feminist genealogy, issues of how as daughters we write about, or to, women of our prior generation, women we leave behind even as we hide in their skirts, feel the beads on their dress, gazing on them in the shadow of passion flowers.² It opens too to questions about art, about severance from the mother in the acquisition of symbolic language, and about the involuntary siding of the artist/daughter with a masculine appropriation of the female body, its loving matter, for artistic means. Involved in these issues, and perhaps most movingly, is a concern for a possible ethical relation to another represented, for a cherishing of a living, present, voluble other, a concern that is pressing as we consider women’s representations of each other, and more urgent still in the particular instance of a daughter’s address in writing, or film, to her mother, her primary witness, her first love. As Alina Marazzi reminds us: ‘The first face we look at indeed is our mother’s face. It’s the one we know and remember best’.³
If this discussion emerges from a description of writing, it takes on a different complexity in relation to the medium specificity and sensory privilege of film. Film as a medium of sensory overload and indexical capture, with its different modes of address and different relations to the real, offers the allure of presence, visibility, and voice. Film enraptures us with the possibility of the pursuit, and expansion, of relationality.

I discuss here a work by Italian director Alina Marazzi, her first documentary Un’Ora sola ti vorrei [For One More Hour With You] (2002). I argue that Marazzi in her filmmaking questions precisely how to write about or even to a mother without consigning her to absence. This question is of particular delicacy in respect to this first film, which is pieced together from rare, completely beautiful footage of the filmmaker’s own mother, Liseli, as an infant, a girl and a young woman. In this first film, and in the works that follow it, Marazzi is opening to all the questions that emerge from Huffer, about the mother/daughter relation, but also about feminist genealogy, the voices, images and sensibilities of other women, about how to make this art, yet remain open to a tremulous, vivid, other, an other who may be loved, unutterably, yet is also unknown. In particular these issues seem charged and disarming as the daughter contends with her mother’s sensuality, her sexuality, those fields of eroticism and feeling of which the daughter is a part, yet which always remain to her in part remote. I see here an inter-relation between these feminist questions, about our mothers, but also about other women, their sexual difference, about their visibility and voice, and the fine aesthetic choices made by Marazzi as she pursues a very sensitive, ethically charged filmmaking practice.
For One More Hour with You opens in darkness to mechanical sounds, apparently a record player being set up. The first image we see is one of indexicality and recording, a spinning record, named in writing mio disco and mon disque, with the appended words ‘Made in Italy’. This circling disk yields a static sound as if music is about to ensue, but the film plays with our perceptions: any recorded sound is delayed, while instead we find that home movie footage of the filmmaker’s mother appears on screen. It is as if, through a form of technological synaesthesia, the sound device we watch has allowed the images to appear like a phantom, the mother here a magic lantern illusion dancing forwards before our eyes.

The mother’s image is slow-moving, languorous, dream-like. We see her hair falling down her face. It is flaxen, honey-coloured, like the grasses where she lies. Its lightness conjures the fine sensory qualities of her presence, her beauty, her softness for the child or lover who might be held in her arms. At moments her hair hides her face so her image is only half disclosed. Even as she is present, this moving apparition, she remains vanishing. She weaves the sunlight in her hair, compels the imagination many days. The image is so tender in its blondness, in the warmth of the enclosure of her wool clothes, two different colours of red. The footage conjures a sense of touch, and the soft, flesh drowsiness of the mother’s embrace. The footage shows a dream of torpor. This is a body near sleep, numbed, soothed, unconscious, turning away.

In its tactile qualities, the image may call us to reflect on possibilities of a sensory, phenomenological reading. Jennifer Barker, in The Tactile Eye, has argued that ‘[e]xploring cinema’s tactility […] opens up the possibility of cinema as an
intimate experience and of our relationship with cinema as a close connection’. She connects tactility with a particular type of relationality, which she thinks of as a form of proximity and even intersubjectivity. She explains: ‘I consider meaning and emotion not as residing in films or viewers, but as emerging in the intimate, tactile encounter between them’. This relation, or encounter, leads to access: ‘In the moment that my skin and the film’s skin press against or envelop one another, the film becomes accessible and transparent to me’. She tempers this language of accessibility only slightly as she pursues thinking about the eroticism of film viewing: ‘[t]he erotic touch is not about ownership or complete knowledge of the other, but is truly intersubjective’.

In For One More Hour with You, the film’s affective heart lies in these images where Liseli is glimpsed like Eurydice, where we see her moving in all her loveliness. The film’s skin, the tactile surface we touch with our eyes, that touches us, is daubed with slow-moving, sensory images of a woman’s face, her hair, the soft matter of her clothes. We are enveloped by this woman’s flesh presence, her materiality. Images of the mother engulf the film and envelop us as we view. We sense the flow of her hair, the blood wound of the colours. Yet for all its sensory fullness the footage also tenderly questions access, intersubjectivity, relationality. Such hesitancy is in the gestures and subject matter of the footage itself, in its play with only partial disclosure as Liseli is serially withdrawn, wrapped up, withheld. As the sequence continues we see her depart, carried away to an Underworld, and in subsequent footage we see her sleeping, her head on one side. She is gently shaken by the jolts of a trap taking her away. She is unconscious, unreachable as she is transported, a mass of shadows and abandonment. The film presses us to imagine intersubjectivity, the encounter of which Barker speaks, yet to feel it vanish, withdrawn, irrevocably.
In the slowed-down footage, we see Liseli toss her hair, moving like a memory replayed so often it has become almost mechanical, worn. The record player sequence at the start has already drawn our attention to the appearance of these images as part of a shadow play, an illusion, and their pictorial quality only enhances this perception. The film is shot through with images of a magician conjuring magic tricks with a sleight of hand, these interludes threading levity and illusion into its texture. The footage at the start has been slowed down so that it is shown at an unreal pace, mechanical distortion and warping allowing us to indulge a wish to cherish and be present with these images, yet also delaying action, tempering it and making its enchanted status the more apparent. The colours of the footage are sapped, faded, adding to their resonance for memory but not for sensory immersion. We hold these images at one remove, even as they move us. They call for a different, more melancholy, sensory and emotive attention. Laura Marks has noted that blurriness and illegibility may aid the process of memory: ‘the melancholia evoked by a dying image may produce […] a loving regard’. She describes this as ‘a kind of compassion and open-ended love’. Marazzi has said of her own work in For One More Hour with You: ‘I penetrated the magic of cinema, which allows us to call up that which is not and to make it present’. She says of her family: ‘Their faces appeared on the screen, smiled and then disappeared in a merciless game of seduction with me. People appeared to me in flesh and blood but did not allow me to touch or embrace them’. Her words call up Ovid’s image of Eurydice: ‘Orpheus stretched out his arms, straining to clasp her and be clasped; but the hapless man touched nothing but yielding air’. The opening images of For One More Hour with You, as they are presented and edited, open an array of sensations. The absent mother is present in her hair, in her lap, in the
texture of her clothes, the rhythms of her sleeping body, yet the film remains hesitant about accessibility and transparency.

As we approach this opening we are drawn to recognise all we can’t see and feel in the image, its illusion and fragility. We encounter our own wishfulness, the desire for immersion, for flesh and blood merger, that is resisted in our reaching towards it. This emerges in the material fragility of the footage itself, its haziness, evanescence, its strange connoting of a time now past. Marks has allowed us to see such footage yielding not access but a more melancholy compassion and open-ended love. This too is rarefied and complicated by Marazzi as her filmmaking practice insists on uncertainty, on love and disappearance, and on love and unknowing. She involves the viewer in this illusion and unknowing, and this is part of the ethical grit and originality of her practice.

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As the images of Liseli are screened, the recording on the disk also begins to be heard. The sounds of the first two minutes of the film come from Liseli Hoepli Marazzi. This sound recording, repeated once again later in the film, is the only time we hear the mother’s own voice in the film. She is a playful mother, telling her child to eat, looking after her, teasing her, playing a game of joy, hectoring, tenderness. Her husband Antonio joins in offering sonorous proof of both parents and of their relation to the child Alina. Their voices are etched on her disk across time and broadcast at the start of the film.

In For More than One Voice, Adriana Cavarero considers voice in infancy. She writes:

Before making itself speech, the voice is an invocation that is addressed to the other and that entrusts itself to an ear that receives it. Its inaugural scene
coincides with birth, where the infant, with her first breath, invokes a voice in response, appeals to an ear to receive her cry, convokes another voice.\textsuperscript{18}

Cavarero draws attention to the relationality, the address to the other, held in the exchange of voice and cry. She explores too the sensory richness of the exchange:

For at the beginning, in the cold and blindness of the first light, in the expulsion from the warmth of the uterine water – at the newborn’s emergence “in order to have what it did not have inside; air and breath, indispensable for phonation” – there is nothing but the sonorous bond of voice to voice'.\textsuperscript{19}

At the opening of her film, Marazzi offers a mechanical echo of her mother’s voice, respecting its sonorous singularity. If she imitates in this opening a moment of first relation, of response, she also calls up most closely in this instance her own mother’s physical, sensory, bodily reality. Cavarero lets us draw out the physicality and concomitant psychic bearing of this hearing of the mother’s voice. She writes:

The sense of hearing, characterised as it is by organs that are internalised by highly sensitive passageways in the head, has its natural referent in a voice that also comes from internal passageways: the mouth, the throat, the network of the lungs.\textsuperscript{20}

And she continues, pressing us, beyond Barthes on the voice’s grain, to think of the fleshiness of the voice:

The play between vocal emission and acoustic perception necessarily involves the internal organs. It implicates a correspondence with the fleshy cavity that alludes to the deep body, the most bodily part of the body. The impalpability of sonorous vibrations, which is as colorless as the air, comes out of a wet mouth and arises from the red of the flesh.\textsuperscript{21}
Reference to Cavarero here reminds us that the recorded voice of Liseli takes us closer even than the tactile images to the interiority of her body, to its lived, loved, textures and rhythms.

At its opening the film offers image and voice, these different sensory imprintsings of the mother’s body, offering a cascading of sensation yet disconcerting us too in the separateness of the material, the act of appending, the illusory conjuring of contact and association on which the editing of soundtrack and image depends. We are in darkness with these sounds and images of the mother. They are infinitely precious yet diaphanous, thin, withheld even as we reach towards them to feel their specificity. These imprints are, in their different ways flickering, distorted. As the film unfolds from this uncertain start, Marazzi moves to make art that sensitizes us to her relation to her mother: this unknowing is the very medium of her meaning making.

At the end of the disk recording, Antonio suggests Liseli sings a song. The song the film supplies is its title track ‘Un’ora sola ti vorrei’. This song accompanies the sunlit, hazy images of Liseli, its melody and sounds supplementing the sensations conjured by the voices of the earlier recording. Then, in a further sleight of hand, we hear a voice: ‘My dearest Alina, the voice you just heard, the joyous, laughing voice, pretending to be telling you and Martino off is my voice. It’s my voice thirty years ago’. The filmmaker herself reads aloud a letter she has written in the voice of her mother. This letter encircles the film and defines its ethical and affective delicacy. In her mother’s voice Marazzi says: ‘For all these years no one has told you anything about me, how I lived, who I was, how I left’. The voice of the daughter speaks in the person of her mother, drawing attention to all that has not been known about the
mother, about how she lived and who she was. The voice-over continues: ‘I want to
tell you my story now it has been so long since I died’. Recognition that the imagined,
composed letter is posthumous draws attention to its fictive, wish-fulfilling status. Yet
at this point it seems no more part of a warp in time, of an illusion, than the recorded
sounds, and flickering, premonitory images in which we have bathed in the film’s
opening. These sounds and images have reached through time, bizarrely, as the letter
too opens a relation that is temporally peculiar, uncertain, unknowing, in love.

Speaking in her mother’s person Marazzi signals that the matter of the film is
her own tremulous desire in response to the images and sounds of her mother
recorded, her way of feeling towards their sensations, and her way of capturing that
process in art. She places her mother’s lived reality that she herself briefly shared in a
tenderly, self-consciously shaped form. Her voice introduces the images that appear
on screen, as if they are seen in an intimate, familial act of looking: ‘look here we
are’, she says, Liseli’s conjured voice guiding as Alina is shown images of her own
parents. There is a sense of knowingness, play, as this history is realised as a story
told, in Marazzi’s voice, as Liseli’s story. This is their story. It is the story of, in
Liseli’s words, or Marazzi’s, ‘our family’. We hear the slippery words: ‘My story and
yours as well begins when grandpa and granny first met’.

This moment of inception of the story is nestled in sensory, black and white,
close-up, slowed-down footage of the grandfather kissing the grandmother on the side
of her neck. Her face turns further sideways in a radiant smile. Marazzi’s voice
whispers the words of a love letter: ‘all other loves seem nothing compared to ours’.
At this moment of viewing it appears that these words offer the interior monologue of
the loved woman, of her love, her sensorium, her emotions. They have no apparent
source, seeming one further, closer realisation of the past animated that has been
allowed in Liseli’s imagined letter. The words here speak of an open-ended, yielding love: ‘My love, you will never have to wish for anything because everything, everything you want from me, I won’t even give it to you, it will be yours straightaway’. The words are whispered here in the softest, most intimate, deeply-felt voice. We attach these deliriously lovely words to the love between the grandfather and grandmother, reckoning that love as the start of the story. Yet this association unravels or changes shape as the film continues. We hear further words: ‘I told you I love you and yet I don’t know anything about you’. These very words return at a subsequent point as we reach the later moment in the story of Liseli’s love for Antonio. And here again we hear: ‘all other loves seem nothing compared to ours’.

The returning words of love open new spaces of unknowing in the film. At some moments Liseli’s own words are collaged into the voice-over. We see her diaries and handwritten words that also form part of the narration. We hear her letters to her friend Sonia. We see, in heartbreaking detail, the cut-out picture letters, the animal clippings, she sent to Alina from the institutions where she was committed, and the postcards in childhood writing Alina sent in return. In this web of intimate writing, the precious diary pages and letters conjuring Liseli’s voice, her existence as a writer, an interlocutor and addressee, all give rise to a sense that the words of love spoken are from her love letters. This sense is only subtly shifted as we realise that the same words attach to separate couplings, to one and then another love relation, source and start in each case of generations of Alina’s story. Yet if the words of love, read by the daughter, can shift their referents, can appear, in their love, metamorphosing, even multi-directional in attention, we may find them existing too as voicing, soft, embodied, whispered, spoken, the mother’s love for her daughter, imagined by Marazzi, and the daughter’s love for her mother, the inception of this film project.
‘I told you I love you and yet I don’t know a thing about you’: Marazzi opens here a relation to her mother that I see as a response to the questions Huffer asks about how a daughter may write about or even to a mother. For One More Hour with You opens to all the knowing and unknowing in that relation, and it locates that unfixing of knowing and unknowing in the play of voices at the start, in the relay of feelings where love is such that one no longer knows who is absent, who is present. In this way Marazzi finds a mode of attention to Liseli as sensitive, singular, ecstatic, despairing, unfixed, unconsigned. Filmmaking practice, the art of the film, its shaping imagination, attention and languor, allow Liseli to be again at once alive and unknowable.

Perhaps the most perfect sensing of this materially, affectively, happens some four minutes into the film. We hear on the voice-over: ‘it was as if I already knew that I would never really manage to fit into the world’. The words come as a feeling forwards towards the depression and despair of the final parts of Liseli’s life. We see slowed down footage of Liseli at a wedding in Milan. Blossoms from a flowering tree cross the image, withholding her. Fine shadows from her lace-work hat fall across her face, and in the slowness of the images we have time to attend to her strange affect here, her smile, her head turning away like Eurydice, her feelings unknowable and yet hesitantly intimated. Liseli turns to see an image of a younger self in black and white, in gingham, smiling, her hair tied back, moving in anticipation. The editing conveys a sense of a glance and a response between the young woman and the girl. The film cuts to a young self in colour, as if we are moving deeper, receding in memory, age, sensation. There is a visceral charge in seeing this wool-clad child, her intense stare into the camera. The shock of those moves, those transitions through time and
consciousness, unknown feeling and sensation at each moment, seems to motivate a move back to the wedding image, the turning head, the young woman’s gesture. In a near form-dissolve this turning head is then replaced by a still younger image, a close-up of a very small child in a luminous cream dress, close-to with her cheeks and hands soft in the image, a tear forming. The film cuts back to the young woman, the smoothness of the editing enhanced by the moves in each piece of footage, and the pale nursery colours through all. Then we see a young girl Liseli in the sea, blue sky and water filling the image. Then there is another smaller child, closer-to again in a rose pink cardigan and smocked dress. She lifts her head and the film cuts to the young woman continuing the movement, and to another older self, against blue, radiant and smiling, tying a headscarf in the wind. These images are all so fleeting, so tremulous, as the editing moves us across time and emotion. We move forwards also to Liseli as mother, turning her head with a child in her arms, as the collage encompasses these fleeting selves at different times. In one of the most intimate moments of address, we see Liseli’s head above sea-green water, her hair sensual and wet around her, her eyes radiant, elusive, happy. This happiness closes the sequence as the image of Liseli at the wedding is now stilled, anticipating its return at the precise close of the film.

This sequence intimates all that we don’t know of ourselves and all that we don’t know of each other. As we hear in voice-over, at a later point: ‘We are always the same yet always different’. Liseli continues: ‘That means you can never judge anyone because you judge them for who they were and now they are different’. The sequence examined, its labile moves, so deftly registered in the near elastic shifts of the editing, open an array of images of the self, of emotions, of transitions that allow some deep registering of Liseli as a singular, enrapturing, sensate, living,
unknowable, unreachable human being. The sensations of viewing mingle immediacy, its living, crystalline moments thick with the pulse and loveliness of this girl alive, and all the sense of opacity of this mother, loved, so passionate, so unknown, so close.

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This address to the living other I see as part of the feminist politics of Marazzi’s project in For One More Hour with You and this is where questions of sexual difference also inhere in this. One answer that Marazzi’s film offers to Huffer’s question comes in her attempt to attend to a full affective range of her mother’s experience and in particular to her sensuality and her sexuality. A source of this in the film is the very set of love-letter texts that have been seen to open a multi-directional discourse of fathomless love. If these are situated in the family romance, in the story of how Alina became, the film is open too to other intimations of Liseli’s sensuality, her living presence, as they are voiced, for example, in her letters to Sonia. These are words of happiness and exhilaration: ‘The more I think about coming back, the happier I get’. She continues, again across time and love relations: ‘this distance makes me realise how much I love you’.

As the film animates a series of images of Liseli at different ages, across time, always new, always blossoming differently, it also opens to her love and her sensuality as open. She questions: ‘Is it possible to love more than one person? I do’. Her love relation with Antonio is, as she wishes it, wild, a love of lovers: ‘the only thing is to be his lover, so he won’t be bound to a wild woman’. She continues: ‘and when he feels like being wild as well he will come to me’. The film offers joyous sensual images of Liseli dancing with her veil on her wedding day, a rock and roll version of ‘Un’ora sola ti vorrei’ on the soundtrack.
In this opening to her mother’s sensuality, the filmmaker finds a disarming source of her mother’s love for her. Liseli’s passions, her febrile, lovely multidirectional loves, open outwards to embrace her daughter. Her loving words, her registering of emotion, ‘when I see you my heart jumps’, as she imagines ‘all the years together ahead of us’, read, imagined, opened by her daughter allow a loving relationality to be held in the film, to be precipitated from this alignment of precious material.

Marazzi’s work here moves against consignment in every sense, against a transparency or fixing of meaning, against any sure sense of intersubjectivity, across generations, across time, across feeling. Her work finds a hallucinatory grace and justness in its attention to her mother and in its telling of her stories, its impossible, beautiful moves to allow her voice to speak and yet also remain unknown. With far wider reach, and in work pursued in her later films, Marazzi moves us to attend to other women, of other generations, in all their finest sensation. And in this sense I see her filmmaking as not only opening to the other as unknowable, but opening to the mother in particular, to our mothers, as loved and unknowable all at once and looking at the particular task, in feminist politics, of attending to, never precluding or fixing, the mother’s emotions, sensations and consciousness.

For One More Hour with You uses moving image art and the resources of editing, of the relation of soundtrack to image, to make us more uncertain, less secure, about understanding and sensation. If it shifts our perceptions, unsettling our sensory encounters, subtly showing our illusions and misreadings, it is to speak a different truth about what we can know of each other and about how a daughter’s art can open to her mother as a living, sensate being. Huffer reminds us that this is an issue of political weight in women’s relation to each other, in their coming to filming and
writing. Marazzi explores how her film, so lovingly fashioned, so protective, so elusive, can attend to her mother Liseli and let her be loved, and still not known at all.


2 I am referring here to passages from Virginia Woolf’s *Moments of Being* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1985)

3 These words are heard on the soundtrack of the film.

4 Liseli Hoepli Marazzi died in 1972 when her daughter, filmmaker Alina Marazzi, was seven years old.

5 Alina Marazzi’s films to date include: *Per sempre* (2005), *Vogliamo anche le rose* [We Want Roses Too] (2007), and *Tutto parla di te* [All about You] (2012).


11 Cristina Gamberi comments on ‘primarily musical and fairy-tale motifs’ in the film, ‘Envisioning Our Mother’s Face: Reading Alina Marazzi’s Un’ora sola ti vorrei and Vogliamo anche le rose’ in *Italian Women Filmmakers and the Gendered Screen*, edited by Maristella Cantini (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 149-172; 158. My reading more loosely summons mythological motifs from Ovid.
I am influenced here by Laura Mulvey’s thoughts on cinema in Death 24x a Second (London: Reaktion, 2006).

Laura Marks, ‘Loving a Disappearing Image’, Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 91-110; 106.

Marks, ‘Loving a Disappearing Image’, 107.

Pietro Roberto Goisis, ‘Quest for a lost mother: Alina Marazzi’s Un’ora sola ti vorrei’, 21-34; 23.

Goisis, ‘Quest for a lost mother’, 23.


Adriana Cavarero, For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression (Stanford, California: California University Press, 2005), 169.


Cavarero, For More Than One Voice, 4.

Cavarero, For More Than One Voice, 4.