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A note on Comedy Vitti Style (2015)

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https://vimeo.com/136444519

I have often been frustrated that outside of Italy, and for English-language audiences in particular, the great Italian actress Monica Vitti is known almost exclusively for her collaboration with Michelangelo Antonioni in films such as *L'Avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), *L'eclisse*(1962), and *Red Desert* (1964). These films are undoubtedly groundbreaking, and Vitti delivers powerful, complex performances. However, one thing they do not show is Vitti's skill as a comic performer. There are hints of this, most clearly in some of the lighter scenes in *L'eclisse*, but to really get a sense of her range as an actor the Antonioni films should be viewed alongside comedies such as Mario Monicelli's *La ragazza con la pistola / The Girl With The Pistol* (1968), Ettore Scola's *Dramma della gelosia* (*tutti i particulari in cronaca*) */ Jealousy, Italian Style*(1970), and perhaps most spectacularly, Dino Risi's *Noi donne siamo fatte così / That's How We Women Are* (1971), in which Vitti plays no less than twelve separate roles.

In this audiovisual essay I use clips from all these films and more. I start with a shot from Steno's*Amori Miei / My Loves* (1978), a film for which Vitti won a David di Donatello award for best actress. In the original scene there is a voiceover from Vitti's character. I decided to remove that audio track, slow the image down, and add audio from an interview where the actor discusses the criticism leveled at her from all sides for both her 'serious' films and her work in comedy.

From there, I move to a memorable sequence from *Jealousy, Italian Style* in which Vitti's character (a florist named Adelaide) practices her English with her fellow Roman market-traders as they have lunch. I introduce the first of two themes from Armando Trovajoli's score for the film, and these go on to regulate the rhythm of the editing throughout the piece. The first is the film's romantic theme, featuring a lilting harpsichord melody characteristic of the composer's work; the second is a more upbeat, jazz-funk cue called 'Meeting at the Balera'.

In between the two passages I use a scene from *The Girl with the Pistol*, the film that for many marked the turning point in Vitti's career. It takes place at a cocktail party in Edinburgh. Assunta Patanè (Vitti) is a young Sicilian woman who is working there as a maid, having come to the UK in search of the man who seduced and abandoned her back home. In the scene, Assunta has a phone conversation with former lover Vincenzo (Carlo Giuffrè) within earshot of all the guests who, rather than continue their own conversations, listen in to the translations provided by their Italian-speaking host.

By focusing on her comic performances, *Comedy Vitti Style* serves as a reminder that Monica Vitti was not only a muse for one of cinema's great auteurs, but also a comedienne of extraordinary playfulness and versatility.