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Karolin Meunier

# ON VAI PURE BY CARLA LONZI

READING SESSION 1 AND 2. EDIT 2

How to introduce a book that I hardly know, written in a language that I do not speak? The following text is the product of two translation sessions, one with Paolo Caffoni and one with Federica Bueti, as we started to read *Vai Pure* (Now You Can Go), a conversation between the Italian feminist, writer, and art historian Carla Lonzi and her partner Pietro Consagra, conducted in Lonzi's apartment in Rome 1980 before they broke up their relationship. Lonzi had used this method—that is recording, publishing and leaving—before: for *Autotratto* (self-portrait), she compiled a number of interviews with different artists into one long group conversation. After publishing it, she abandoned the art world and rejected any form of theoretical writing. I became aware of the book in the context of my research into how access to individual experience is accomplished through cultural techniques, e.g. confessional writing or interviews. In particular I was curious about the way Carla Lonzi used the recording and the publishing of conversations as a specific means to challenge a standardised use of language in public and private.

Considering that I do not speak Italian, I have to rely on people who do and who can explain to me the content of the book in a language I am more familiar with, English. Inevitably these translators bring in their own knowledge and opinions about the author, context, and content of the book, as well as their own take on the two languages. I go through the book with different people and record, transcribe and edit our discussions, not aiming for a final version. The material generated by this kind of translation process may be considered as a commentary on the original text and the possible questions it raises for us today.

I've started to edit the transcribed material into one text, not indicating the authorship of each statement and allowing

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the original dialogue to sometimes blend in with the new one. The following excerpt starts where the first edit ended.<sup>[1]</sup>

Shall we continue? Where did we stop?

Ok, let's see, I translate ..., Consagra starts again: "This is referring to a relationship based on understanding. I understand your problems, your necessities and your polemics against me, against the male world and against the artist" ... He repeats himself: "we are two intellectuals, who on the one hand have the fascination of understanding each other, but on the other hand there's the necessity not to be dragged into the needs of the other". And then: "You see my desire for work and for self-affirmation critically. Everything that is negated by your idea of feminist consciousness—you are experiencing all of this with me".

The feminist consciousness... what does that mean here? Is this what he literally says?

I think he is referring to the ideas that were discussed in the feminist groups in Milan. He says something about this a little later: "I understand you and the problems of the feminists, but I am acting within the problems of the man. And these problems are not invented by me being childish". Lonzi: "Of course, these problems exist, and the problems of the woman also exist".

Is it singular or plural?

No, singular, the man and the woman. Lonzi: "I am not negating these problems, but I am rejecting your traditional way of resolving them". That's the end of the paragraph. She's criticising him: "all this understanding of each other you were mentioning before, for me it is an understanding of life, my life, your life, and our relationship. And this relationship, all this understanding of each other that we have, for you it's an intellectual baggage, something you just carry with you. You say that we are two intellectuals, which I don't like and would also never say. Because for me my understanding is very connected to the way I move on within my life. I cannot separate the decisions I take from what I think. I cannot do that. I don't want to do that. I don't want to separate the practice of my everyday life and how I find solutions to my problems from this intellectual dimension, I cannot keep them apart. I cannot see a contradiction between the two, I don't want to. For me everything is going together. From the moment I understand something about myself or about you, I am acting accordingly. When I understand one thing and then do another I feel like I..."—*massacrata ... violating, hurting oneself, massacrare*

[1] A first part will be published in: ...ment journal, Issue 7: "Effacement (undoing the self)", edited by Mirene Arsanios, Federica Bueti, 2017.

C is very dramatic, she is making a massacre of herself—“While for you the misunderstanding which I feel being trapped in is: on the one hand you understand something, but then you continue on the usual path, you continue with the usual way of how to do things”.

She says misunderstanding?

No, it's not a misunderstanding, wait—inganno, the mistake, the fallacy. She repeats what he said before, but rephrasing it somehow. Consagra responds: “I present myself as a traditional person, while you are presenting yourself as someone with new necessities”. Lonzi says: “No, these are not new necessities, they are my necessities!” She brings him back to the ‘I’. She insists, “no, they are not new, they are mine. They are not emerging now, they’ve always been there, I am just not ignoring them any longer in order to make more space for yours”. Consagra: “okay, but your needs somehow presented themselves to me as discovered needs”. Lonzi: “Well, let’s not make it a question of who is the avant-garde here, because otherwise I feel like we are talking like intellectuals. I understand something of my life, but I don’t think this is anything new, in the sense that women have understood these things even before me. There is nothing new about it, but very often they renounced it”. She says: “I am not sure where this is taking me, but I can’t prioritise one of the two needs. I desire love, that is love of my autonomy—and that is not love of my dependency and of my service to you”. She describes the dichotomy between autonomy and love. If you love you cannot be autonomous, but if you are autonomous, you cannot love. Always in a very traditional understanding of what love is.

And of what autonomy is.

Right. And then she makes that distinction of autonomy and the kind of freedom Consagra is looking for. And she describes his desire as an escapist dream of being completely unrelated, to be left alone on its own. “Whereas for me”, she says, “autonomy is recognition, being in a relationship, it is a transformative moment. It’s when someone recognises you. Not when you are left alone in your solipsistic fantasy”. Consagra: “You see, when I say, I want to go to the studio, I want to be alone, I would like to travel, I would like to meet others. All these are needs for autonomy, that is to say of moving without having someone next to me who wants other things”.

Well, fair enough...

Yeah, it’s pretty simple. That’s Lonzi responding: “Until now I was open and willing to be with you and to accept the contradictions that you were bringing to my life, and to keep

C them as an ingredient, exactly in the sense of being part of our relationship. But it seems to me that you want an agreement that is not in any way accepting the contradictions that I bring to your life. But these are—soluzionioni già sperimentate”—that is also a very important term, meaning an already tested or proved solution, “which precisely negates the sense of our relationship”. Lonzi really tries not to adopt that kind of already existing habits or concepts. That’s why her writing is interesting, because she refuses to use jargon, a theoretical or philosophical jargon, and in the same way tries to live a life that is not already a sort of normative life.

And yet she refuses the term avant-garde as well.

Yes, but again, the avant-garde is an accepted concept. So she might rephrase things, but she would always refuse to see herself as an intellectual, to see herself as someone who is already fully integrated into society. She tries to get rid of these concepts, including avant-garde, including certain behaviours, everything that is already embedded into a culture. For her the relationship, the meaning of a relationship is precisely the possibility for change through dialogue.

And that is actually similar to the practice of autocoscienza, right?<sup>[2]</sup> Like that is what they were trying together.

Yeah, but then she brings it outside of the group. It becomes her writing practice, a practice of undoing the self that goes through these conversations, the diary, other experiments. For Lonzi, before you even get to the point of constructing something, you have to completely deconstruct what is around you. And she tried really hard: undoing of the language, undoing of sexuality, undoing the self. That’s pretty much her project.

And this is somehow present in the recording. To create a moment of publicness, and also to be able to go back and listen to it, turning your speech into an object.

Yes, and that’s what I find especially interesting in Lonzi’s work, this aspect of objectification, which I do believe also happens here. Basically she goes through this analysis, of the self, of the couple. She dissects the relationship, to find a way to objectify herself, to see herself outside of herself through writing.

And how is it to read this?

[2] Autocoscienza can be translated as ‘self-consciousness practices’. It describes the practice of small groups of women who met to talk about themselves or anything else that was based on their personal experience. Unlike the English expression ‘consciousness-raising’, the Italian word suggests an auto-induced or self-directed process.

C Well, like all the Lonzi books, there is something tedious about it. She always keeps digging. That is her mode of analysis. Sometimes it can be ... it's extreme, it's tiring.  
Maybe that's her idea of getting rid of patterns: to go through them... over and over again.

## C DISCUSSION

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KLS :  
KLASSENSPRACHEN  
KM :  
Karolin Meunier

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KM :

I was thinking about what it means to read spoken language, also in terms of Sara M. Harrison's contribution. When you read something, you take the words of someone else, but you do not really know, while you are reading, whether you are affirmative of what you read. Still, you embody it.

KLS :

You were also talking about this aspect of recording, about objectifying yourself, about becoming an object and getting rid of yourself, and, at the end, about becoming a pattern through repetition.

KM :

There is this text of Lonzi, which was translated and is well-known, titled "Let's spit on Hegel". I read it and was surprised by how clear she was on class struggle, saying, yeah, that is a fine idea but women are not coming after class struggle; that it is another problem. She rejected that language completely and tried to work through another kind of language.

KLS :

As far as I understood it, it was also a declassification of fixed terms: a dissociating of categories, which is interesting in relation to the macro level of juridical subjectivity which Thomas Locher was talking about.

But then, today, in this very different historical moment, it also sounds like she is repeating all these desires of coupledness, which she is fighting against, reinvigorating them while distancing herself from them.

KM :

To some extent, yes. Though I think what is still relevant is Lonzi's question of how her radical ideas for political change affect her relationship. The fact that she treated this private conversation in a similar way as the ones she initiated as an art critic shows perhaps that there is no easy way out.

Die Ausgabe 0 von *Klassensprachen* erscheint im Zusammenhang mit dem gleichnamigen Ausstellungs- und Veranstaltungsprojekt in Koproduktion mit District in Berlin und ist auf der Grundlage von Beiträgen des projekt-internen Workshops entstanden, der im Mai 2017 stattfand. / Issue 0 of *Klassensprachen* is published in conjunction with the eponymous exhibition and debate project co-produced with District Berlin. It is based on the contributions to an internal workshop that took place in May 2017.

Klassensprachen.

Ausstellung, Magazin. Debatte.

Das Zeichen wird zur Arena des K.

Kai Althoff/Isa Genzken, Gerry Bibby, Cana Bilir-Meier, Sean Bonney, Hans-Christian Dany, Övül Ö. Durmuşoğlu, Michaela Eichwald, Frank Engster, Fehras Publishing Practices, keyon gaskin, Sarah M. Harrison, HATE MAGAZIN, Infocfiction, Ann Hirsch, Karl Holmqvist, Stephan Janitzky, Jutta Koether, Justin Lieberman, Hanne Lippard, Thomas Locher, MC Baustelle, The Cultural Capital Cooperative, Karolin Meunier, Rachel O'Reilly, Phase 2, Johannes Paul Raether, Monika Rinck, Aykan Safoğlu, Juliana Spahr, spot the silence, Starship, Josef Strau, Marlene Streeruwitz, Hans Stützer, Linda Stupart, Ryan Trecartin, Peter Wächtler, Ian White, Tanja Widmann, Frank B. Wilderson III, Susanne M. Winterling

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