



◆ “B-side/Back Office Feminism/Transcription Marathon”, République Géniale Kunstmuseum Bern, 2019

# LIVING (IN) THE ARCHIVES OF RADICAL FEMINISM



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We are working towards critical reconquering of institutional art space through the deployment of works by women artists—for example, the tent structures of Carla Accardi— by creating a scholarly-artistic-performative-ephemeral body, where the participants invest the space with their bodies and their know-how.

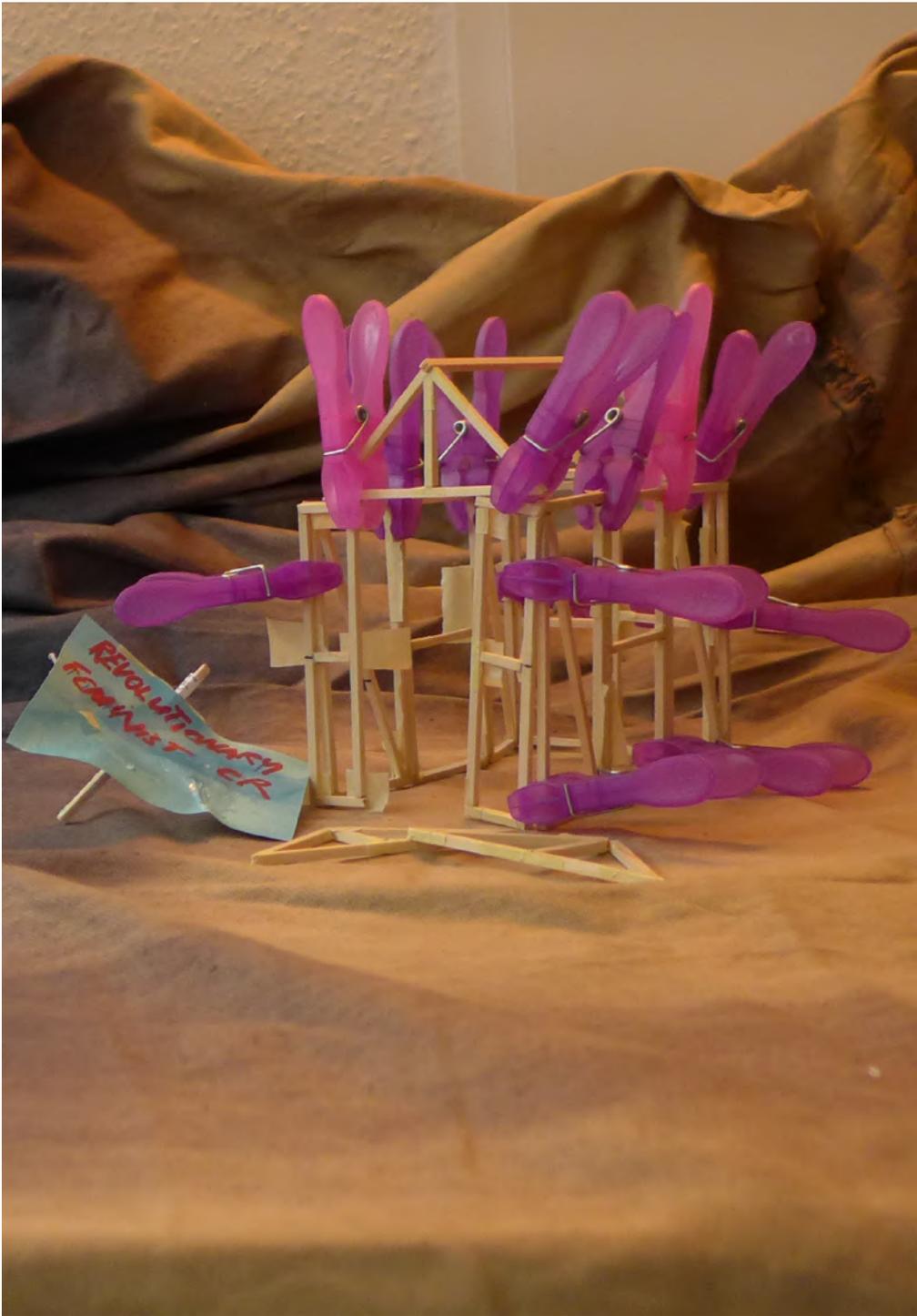
Who are we? We are women artists, academics, carers, public intellectuals, sex workers, students, workers of all kinds, women on collective and personal political emancipation journeys.

Our various activities are to be taken as *camping sauvage*: we invest museums and art spaces, creating self-managed territories for the transmission and development of feminist empowerment practices: self-education, self-construction, self-defense, self-financing, self-production, self-naming. We live there, we cook, we wash, we work, we dance, we sleep. We think we talk to each other, we establish lines of thought for our activism and artistic practice. We enter these spaces and create an expanded, living, participatory archive. We take up works and practices that have been frozen by their institutionalization and sacralization in the field of art, which has its own sterile internal logic that prevents use and life. In doing so, we challenge the separation between art and life and enter a field of ambiguity and subversion.

We ask our godmothers—contemporary female artists—to donate their work (images, recordings, writings, etc.), which we incorporate into our installations. In this way, our spaces have a multiple and intergenerational texture, a feminist, artistic and militant echo that transcends individual boundaries to produce a collective vibration: THIS IS NOW!

We have completed the transcription of the *Rivolta Femine* archive (fifty hours of recording of Italian consciousness-raising group sessions). This provides us with a modular material that we have to constantly evaluate and make evolve through various artistic and research experiences. We wish to identify and engage with further alternative, secret and neglected feminist archives, in order to create an international archival network.

Our line can be described as comparative feminism: we investigate the ways in which the practice of consciousness-raising has been used—or not used—in different feminisms, both historically and in contemporary practice. To do so, we will invite activists from different currents (Afrofeminists, Latinx-feminists, Transfeminists, in short, the components of deeply intersectional feminism) to discuss and exchange around this liberating practice. In our eyes, this practice allows access to a feminist consciousness that is as much theoretical as it is concrete.



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# B-SIDE FEMINISM

On the occasion of the exhibition project *La République Géniale*, the Kunstmuseum in Bern will host an exceptional event: the second collective transcription marathon of the audio archives of *Rivolta Femminile* (Rome, 1970s). These archives—amounting to about five-hundred hours of recordings in total—consisting of a series of tapes recorded between 1971 and 1972 by small groups of Italian radical feminists, while exercising together with the practice of *autocoscienza*. This will be the first time anyone listens to these tapes outside the self-contained cluster of *Rivolta Femminile*, and—as they happened to be recorded in non-mixed collective frameworks at the time—it is crucial to us that this operation occurs today in women-only collective environments.

In light of these considerations, a number of women have been invited to join the working group and participate in the marathon. The transcription team will be composed of women from different backgrounds: students, activists, separatists, scholars, artists, curators, teachers, as well as women working in non-executive administrative positions. The encounter of this heterogeneous ensemble generates a transversal and intersectional feminist working team, which embraces a roaming approach by intervening, in turn, within a series of institutional and para-institutional contexts.

At the core of this project rests on the implementation of two distinct positions. The first—which we call back-office, or b-side feminism—strives to make visible a form of labor that often goes unseen and that is traditionally done by women, be it in commercial, corporate or cultural domains. By exposing the work of transcription in a public setting, we aim at re-valuing labor, which is frequently dis—or under—valued.

The second approach is that of participatory science, a practice that is gaining recognition in the hard sciences but hasn't had much exposure in the academic domain so far. The collaborative approach comes in the procedure of transcription as a disruptive element, as archive material is usually transcribed by one or a handful of people working in isolation. By bringing this process into the exhibition space and turning this latter into a space of production, we aim not only at making visible invisible work but also at reenergizing the process of knowledge production and transmission, powered by the joint action of a feminine collective subject. We call it a marathon because, in this collaborative transcription process, time and endurance will be of the essence.



◆ “Boîte à chaussures”, containing the archives of the self-awareness sessions of the Roman group of *Rivolta Femminile*, 1971-1972. Photograph by Sandra Pointet, 2014



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👤 “B-side/Back Office Feminism/Transcription Marathon” The first marathon will take place within the artist-run space *one gee in fog* in Geneva, 2018

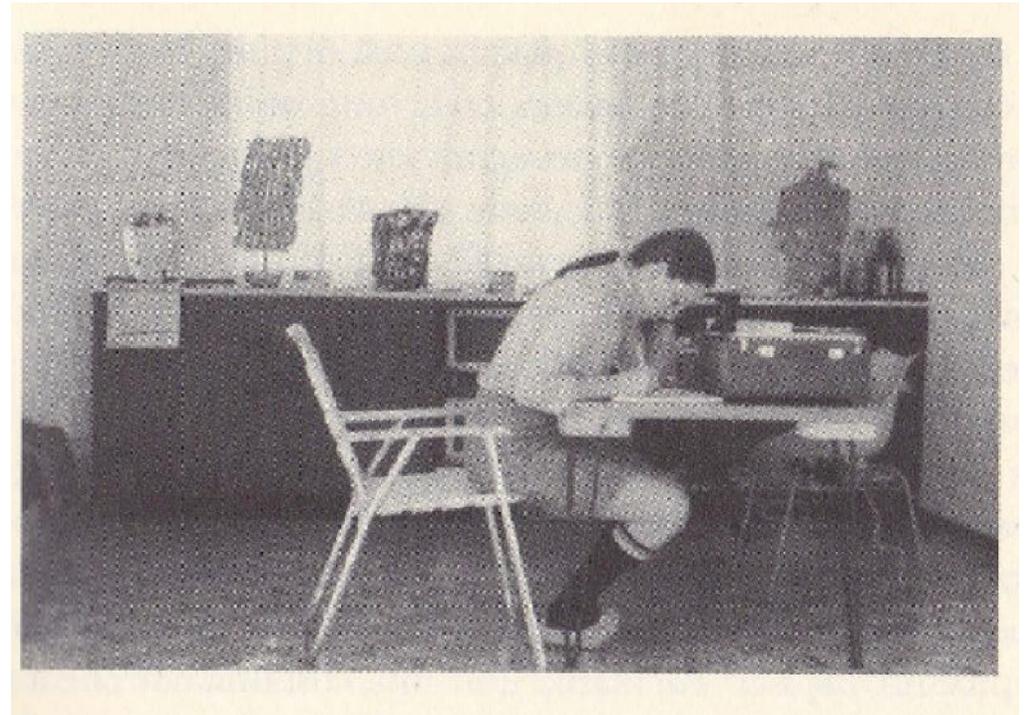
# LISTEN, RADICAL FEMINISM

The work of transcribing and then translating the audio archive relating to 1970s radical feminist Italian consciousness-raising sessions is a perilous exercise in achieving the right balance between rendering in writing words that run the risk of being lost to posterity, and preserving the oral nature of the conversations.

Indeed, the orality of the archive is one of its essential features. By making audio tapes of the discussions that constituted the process of consciousness-raising, the Italian feminists bore witness to their conviction that their work during those sessions was important and worth saving. However, the fact that they chose to record their discussions in the oral form of tape begs a couple of questions: First, did they have the intention to transcribe these sessions? Did they envisage a “transcription marathon” of their own? Did this ever happen? Have the written records be lost or destroyed? Second, if there was no intention to transcribe, were the women aware that the orality of the medium seems to encapsulate a number of particularly feminine and feminist elements? There is an inbuilt horizontality in the discussions; there do not seem to be leaders, or persons authorizing others to speak; the rendering of experience and the exchange of information is effected on a non-hierarchical, level plane.

Then, the temporality of recorded discussion is one that extends and fills time just as real conversation does; there are pauses, repetitions; there is something inherently transitory and ephemeral in the taped discussions. Another important element is the hesitancy of expression, the ways in which words are used as temporary islands of expression, as sense emerges with difficulty, often with help from others. There is a sense in which some of the women can be said to give birth to their consciousness, aided and encouraged by the other participants. Finally, there is an element of grammatical, syntactical and even semantic confusion, which is typical of spontaneous oral exchange.

These characteristics of the audio archive make it possible to analyse in terms of Hélène Cixious’s notion of *écriture féminine*. In the introduction to a 2015 collection *Écriture féminine aux XXe et XXIe siècles*<sup>4</sup>, Chloé Chaudet gives three main components for Cixious’s theory of feminine writing: first, an inherent orality and focus on the voice; second, a strong link to bodily aspects; and third, the requirement for intimacy. These elements are present in the audio archive: it is oral, so made up of voices; the women are present, bodily present, in the moment of recording – indeed, at times we can hear them cough or fidget or move; finally, the sessions were certainly very intimate, with the women at times



◆ Carla Lonzi, “Autoritratto”, Et al./ Edizioni, Milan 2010, p. 29 - pp. 336

discussing extremely personal matters, and with the women needing to be at ease with such interpersonal intimacy and exchange.

As the project moved towards transcription and translation, these matters of orality were preserved, as far as was possible. Indeed, it would probably be safe to say that in future transcriptions and translations, such characteristics would be actively sought out and foregrounded.

⚡ Chloé Chaudet, “Introduction”, *SELF XX-XXI, Écriture féminine aux XXe et XXIe siècles, entre stéréotype et concept*.  
<https://self.hypotheses.org/publications-en-ligne/ecriture-feminine-aux-xxe-et-xxie-siecles-introduction>

At one point I said that consciousness-raising  
could be like opium..

Sorry, but why does someone..  
here, we are talking about feminism,  
and then you get home

Yeah, I think this consciousness-raising  
thing is really fundamental too.

and the subject doesn't exist anymore.

Maybe consciousness-raising  
isn't conscious.. I don't know..

I mean that, as a feminist,  
you have this problem.

# REPLAY

## A REPLAY OF TRYING TO MAKE THE PERSONAL POLITICAL: FEMINISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING.

*Every interesting aesthetic tendency now is a species of radicalism. The question each artist must ask is: What is my radicalism, the one dictated by my gifts and temperament? This doesn't mean all contemporary artists believe that art progresses. A radical position isn't necessarily a forward-looking position.*

Susan Sontag, "Film and Theatre", 1966, Pp. 35

The practice of consciousness-raising invites participants to ask questions and to collectively share their thoughts around the topics addressed. Every woman has been confronted by these questions, but has rarely had the opportunity to discuss them in depth, in an all women environment. By linking each person's individual experience, the questions take on a different meaning, either a new meaning, or an updated meaning. These topics, which are taken from a catalogue of questions put together by a handful of groups who practiced consciousness-raising in the 1970s (ref.), are used here as a point of departure, and give body to the group.

This multiple body, run through as it is by a fresh understanding of the world, reveals through individual consciousness-raising a new sense of becoming woman. The deconstruction of patriarchal social pathologies, far from leading to sterility and stasis, to resignation or even depression, generates a resonating and multiple creative energy.

This energy will be caught by different forms of recording (audio, video), which will enable a feminist theory to emerge. Participants will thus be armed to confront the questions thrown up by specific group dynamics. In the film that we made on 23rd May 2018, the group was composed of students on the Fine Arts MA at the HEAD. The participants introduced a series of questions specific to the practice of art by women, as well as on the practice of feminist art.

We noticed that through the experience of a consciousness-raising practice, our group achieved extreme sensibility, which led us to seek a form (in the artistic sense of form) for this uncommon state, and to transcribe this singular manifestation of women's expression.

The film is a 3h21 single take, including an interval. If it was filmed in one day, during which we practiced consciousness-raising, it was the result of eight months' preparation. The group convened regularly for consciousness-raising sessions that

were not recorded. Each stage was vital to build links between the participants, in order to guarantee an internal ethic to the group, which allowed to record and subsequently to diffuse the free and spontaneous exchanges that took place.

The single take is a cinematographic challenge, as it must be filmed in a single take. By clearly establishing the rules for filming, each person is aware of the stakes. Thus, the participants had a triple function. First, they are "actors", they speak singly and one after another; second, they practice "active listening" either in silence or by stimulating the discussion with questions or requests for detail; and third, they are "camerawomen", holding the camera, framing the action, speakers, listeners. The camera is passed from hand to hand fluidly, following the turn-taking in speech. It captures words, silences, faces, bodies, background, concurrent actions such as drinking, eating, taking notes, drawing, etc.

The point of view changes, and the group is captured from the inside. It was vital for the group not to introduce an exterior, "neutral", gaze. Hence, the group was born in a temporality of duration, and the group as a whole never appears at once. We could call this a selfie of non-alienated consciousness, as opposed to the narcissistic selfie of a body. The experience is for viewing in real time. The video, which the group watched afterwards, enabled us to conclude that all these questions linked to the practice of radical feminism are highly political, and reactivate the statement of second-wave feminism that "the private is political".



“Unfinished\_Business”, video still, Science Talk, Sattelkammer, Bern, 2019



✦ *A Replay of Trying to Make the Personal Political: Feminism and Consciousness-Raising.* (1-12), Time: 3h 21min., 2018



Tutte hanno  
curiosità di sapere  
come sia per Helena  
la nuova vita,  
e tutte hanno voglia  
di dire la loro in  
proposito.

# CHANTS DE L'ENFER

F\*\*\*\*\*

This audio project, which I wish to carry out to the Swiss Institute Contemporary Art at New York, is part of a project initiated in 2017 and which revolves around a sound archive recorded during *consciousness-raising* sessions between 1970 and 1972 by the Roman feminist group RIVOLTA FEMMINILE.

The title of this sound piece refers on the one hand to the 3rd part of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, and on the other hand to the typographic censorship of the word F\*\*\*/Fuck. The title is censored: *Chants de l'Enfer Féministe* becomes *Chants de l'Enfer F\*\*\*\*\**. The major methodological axis of this piece will be the subversion of female voices produced by artificial intelligence technologies (Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant, etc.) and then the production of a feminist device that uses the same technologies.

The notion of censorship underlines the spirit of the project, which seeks to bring to light repressed, i.e. censored, contents. This posture is political since language is hijacked and F\*\*\*\*\* becomes a word of empowerment.

In order to highlight and divert misleading and harmful practices of personal assistance robots (Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant, etc.) I will use the same synthetic voice technology to en-voice the diary I have kept since the beginning of my work with the RIVOLTA FEMMINILE archives, interspersed with quotations from radical feminist texts. This will bring into the public space a trace of my private writing.

- ✦ Arcangela Tarabotti, born in Venice in 1604, died in 1652, is developing similar thinking on the issue. His experience personal -study conditions and access to publication- is the starting point for its consideration. In the writings that she left us, she makes a grim statement and pessimistic: the often violent hostility of society and representatives of culture makes it impossible, with rare exceptions of which she is one, for women to practise the practice of writing. The denunciation of a situation of blatant inequality between men and women is accompanied by the drafting of a social reform project providing for free access to studies for women.
- ⚡ Arcangela Tarabotti, "Tirannia Paterna Inferno Monacale", Casa Editrice Fantasma, 1630. In Anna Jaquinta's "La presenza dell'uomo nel femminismo", Tentativi di autocoscienza in un gruppo dell'500, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile 9, 1978.
- ✦ "Casa delle donne", Entrance Hall, Rome.



## THE VOICE AND THE INSTALLATION

I'll be working with Lyrebird software. This software is designed to clone any voice. You have to "train" it, that is to say read a few hundred sentences to it, then it reproduces the phrasing, accent and tessitura which are incorporated by artificial intelligence. Why use this software and how to problematize it?

The female voices of the robots, called feminine, of personal assistants like Alexa are submissive and sexist voices, which seem to reproduce the domestic space of the 1950s, imitating the women who evolved in this space exclusively.

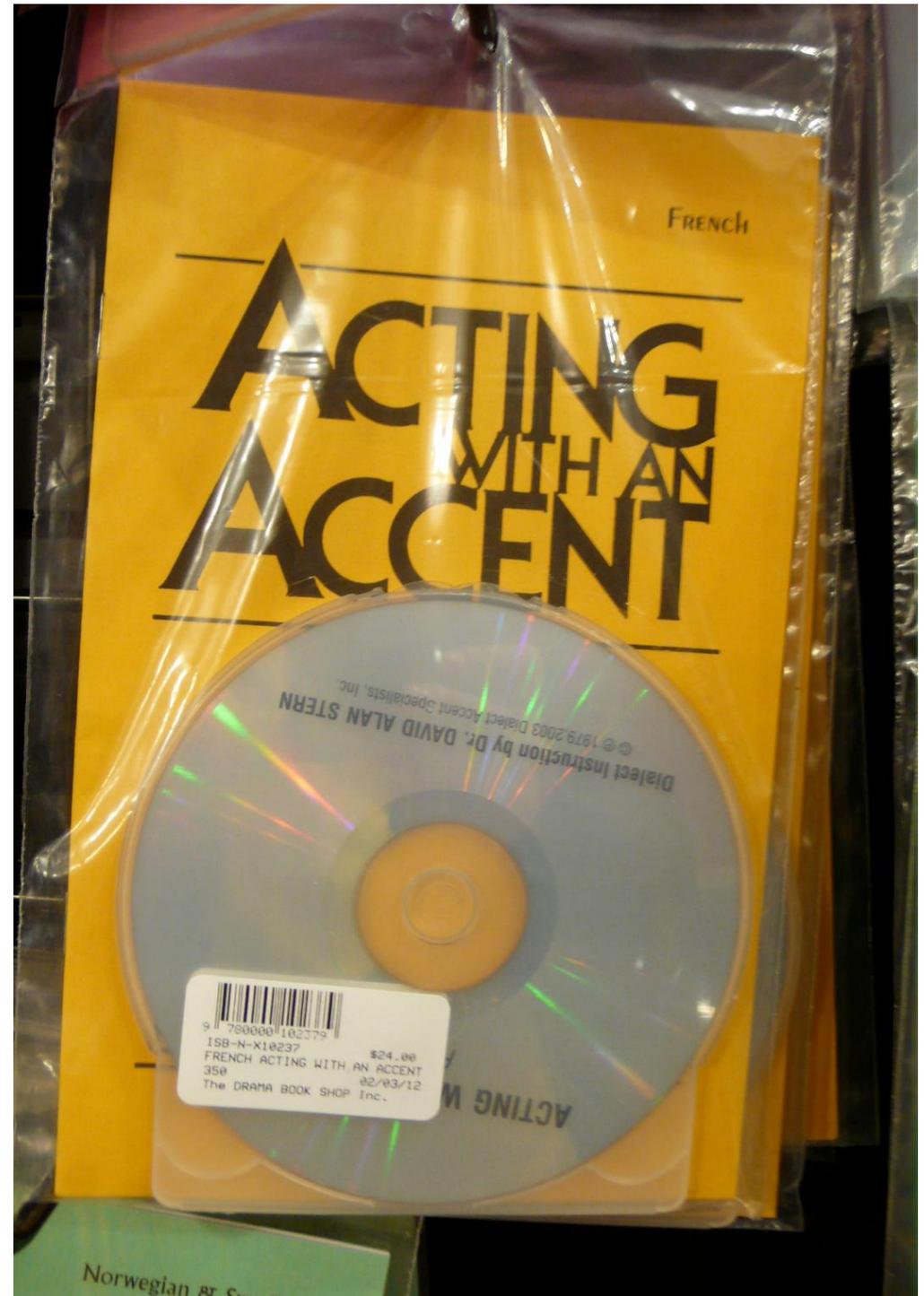
By creating a clone of the voice of my alter ego MAKITA, I erect an obstacle that interrupts the natural process of identification. At the same time, I create a double, a disturbing simulacrum. The double can transfer and interpret with more freedom the songs that make up *Chants de l'Enfer F\*\*\*\*\**.

In addition to the sound piece, there will be a roll of paper, like a parchment, with the text, which will be hung on a metal hanger. The *Chants de l'Enfer F\*\*\*\*\** will be printed on the roll with a typography designed by women.

A costume will also be exposed on a hanger. It will be made with a technical fabric used in theatre, cinema and photography, which absorbs all light. On the costume there will be a large scale embroidery of a quotation. The embroidery will also use a typography made by women. I will use a fluorescent thread, which stores light during the day, and will be visible only in absolute darkness.



◆ “Unfinished\_Business”, video still, Science Talk, Sattelkammer, Bern, 2019



👤 “Acting with an Accent”, NYC, 2012

# HOW TO TAKE CARE OF RADICAL FEMINISM

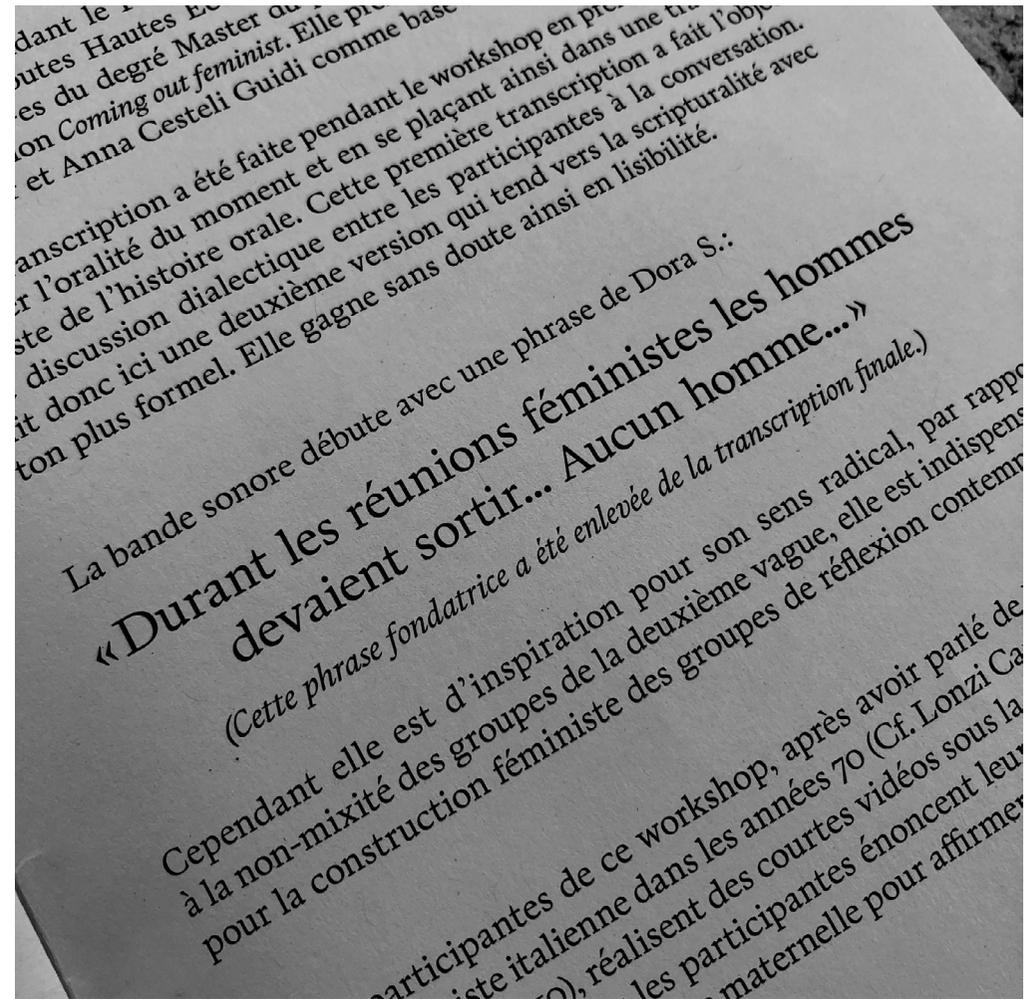
This *Fascioletto Speciale* is the result of several moments of the project. It begins with the recording of the conversation between three women (Dora Stiefelmeyer, Anna Cesteli Guidi and Angela Marzullo) that took place in Rome at the RAM (www.radioartemobile.it) in September 2015. The audio tape was then exhibited as part of the exhibition *Sviluppo Parallelo* at the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne from 31 October 2015 to 31 October 2016 simultaneously; it could be podcast on the RAM website.

In 2017, during the CH Pool, which brings together workshop offers from all Swiss Art Schools and is open to all Master's degree students in Switzerland. Angela Marzullo has included it in her proposal *Coming out feminist*. She takes the conversation with Dora Stiefelmeier and Anna Cesteli Guidi as a basis for her work.

A transcription was made during the workshop, taking care to respect the orality of the moment and thus placing itself in a feminist tradition of oral history. This first transcription was the subject of a dialectical discussion between the participants in the conversation. A second version is therefore read here, which tends towards scripturality with a more formal tone. It probably gains in readability in this way.

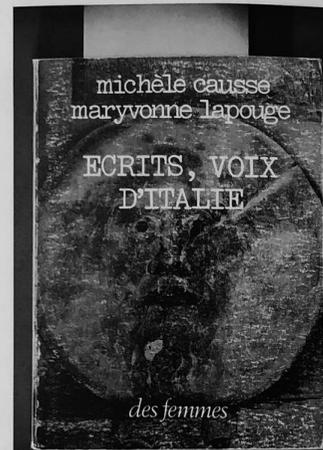
The soundtrack begins with a sentence by Dora S.: “During feminist meetings men had to go out.... No man...” (*This founding phrase was removed from the final transcript.*) However, it is inspiring for its radical meaning, in relation to the non-mixing of the groups of the second wave, it is indispensable for the feminist construction of contemporary think tanks.

The participants of this workshop, after talking about the Italian feminist second wave in the 1970s (Cf. Lonzi Carla, *Autoritratto*, Milano, et al., 2010), make short videos in the form of self-portraits. In these videos the participants state their personal feminist mantra in their mother tongue to affirm their self-consciousness.



↑ “How to Take Care of Radical Feminism”, Ed. Angela Marzullo and HEAD—Genève, 2018

# HOW TO TAKE CARE OF RADICAL FEMINISM



ANGELA: Consciousness-raising is highly valued in the work of Carla Lonzi. Could you tell us about these moments of consciousness-raising?

DONNA: Personally I never participated in these consciousness-raising groups. I came from a different approach. From what I know from various testimonies they were marathon meetings. Regarding *Rivista Femminile*, the contradictions came to the fore during a stay in Sicily, near Trapani. There is a little known book by Carla, *Taci, anzi parla* about that experience. The stay lasted some ten days. All the women present appear in the text under different names. This was the type of consciousness-raising that Carla Lonzi liked.

«They talked and talked,  
and they recorded everything.  
Each one brought out their own life.»

Carla Accardi, who was part of that group, spoke of her horrible experience at the secondary school where she had taught art. She had invited the girls in her classes to reflect on their place in the world. Some of them told their parents of their teachers' discussions. Carla was issued a warning and was thrown out of the school despite being defended by a very good lawyer (the same lawyer that had also defended the Red Brigade). There is a little book that discusses this story of the students.

For Carla it was an awful experience. She paid for her link to feminism in a very tangible way. After that, she spoke of the experience to Lonzi who criticised her careerism. She said she had already paid for her commitment and she didn't need to take lessons from anyone. For Carla Accardi this experience was a sign that she should dedicate herself to her art and nothing else. These were the years when she did artworks in transparent plastic, without colour, without anything, plastic *tout court*. Beautiful. There is certainly a link between her life experience at the time and her work. At the beginning of their relationship, Carla Lonzi was very close to Accardi's work, so much so that she even presented her in the 1964 Venice Biennale. With her new feminist life she no longer wanted to do that.

ANGELA: What was the Carla Lonzi's relationship with faith, with the spiritual dimension?

DONNA: In the many lunches we had together, I never once heard Carla talk about faith or religious commitment.

ANGELA: Somewhere (I can't remember where) I read that there was a great spiritual force within her.

DONNA: Yes, but inside her. Like nearly all of us feminists, she thought that monotheist religions were profoundly against women. It was one of the few points that were shared by all parts of the movement. In this respect, it is worth remembering the controversial position of Ida Magli.

ANGELA: I did some university classes with Ida Magli, she taught Theology and Anthropology.

DONNA: Ida Magli participated in the first phase of *DWF* (*Donna Woman Femme*) by writing a long essay for the journal: *from natural history to cultural history - women in anthropological research, notes of an anthropologist, the power of words and silence of women*.

Magli was an ex-nun. Obviously she would try to add grit to her mill. You have to give her credit though for a certain brilliance in her interpretation of the sacred. A year into the fight against abortion, she retired. *DWF* had its own identity and could not have a person going against them on their staff. After she retired I took her place, covering human sciences.

ANGELA: This women's-studies journal was very different to Carla Lonzi's position.

DONNA: Totally different. It was a collection of scientific articles by women. We maintained that in all sciences the viewpoint was heavily influenced by the male ego. As such, it's was rather distant argument to that of *Rivista Femminile*; we were closer to the Anglo-Saxon feminists. *DWF* had 3 series; the first from 1975 to 1976 with the subtitle *Rivista internazionale di studi antropologici storici e sociali sulla donna*; the second from 1976 to 1985 with the name *Nuova DWF, Donna Woman Femme. Quaderni di studi internazionali sulla donna*; the third from 1986, with the title *DWF, donna woman femme*.