



## Generating Feminisms: Italian Feminisms and the “Now You Can Go” Program

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Carla Lonzi's thinking can therefore be regarded as a weapon that spares nothing—including its own author—and whose unsettling power still remains intact and contagious today.

—Claire Fontaine

It is so important that contemporary practitioners are able to contribute to feminist futures by affirming, citing, and respecting feminist genealogies without appealing to their similarity, or identity with those genealogies. In this way, they are able to obtain the authority to speak simultaneously through their own singularity, their irreducible (sexual) difference, and also through their common participation in a transgenerational political project—a common desire for a culture of difference.

—Alex Martinis Roe

In 1980 Carla Lonzi, the poet, feminist, and former art critic, published a dialogue between herself and her lover of almost twenty years, the prominent avant-garde sculptor Pietro Consagra. After a four-day discussion of how love, creativity, work, and career played out in their relationship, Lonzi concludes that she must choose love for her autonomy over that offered within their romantic partnership. She ends by terminating their relationship with words that lend the book its title: “vai pure” (now you can go).<sup>1</sup> This withdrawal is just one of several renunciations that Lonzi enacted throughout her life. In 1970 she resigned her position within what she had come to regard as the “inauthentic profession” of art criticism.<sup>2</sup> In 1975, having spent the previous five years channeling her energies into Rivolta Femminile (Female Revolt), the Milan collective she cofounded with the artist Carla Accardi—and which itself constituted a form of separatist withdrawal—Lonzi renounced feminist leadership. Even while active in Rivolta Femminile, Lonzi distanced herself from artist members of the group, rejecting the prospect that she would take on a promotional role by becoming “the Lucy Lippard of the situation.”<sup>3</sup> Instead of seeking greater recognition for women within the art world, she renounced that system and its means of attributing value altogether.

These various iterations of what Lonzi termed “deculturation” formed the starting point for a thirteen-day-long series of events that I developed in 2015 with six feminist curators, artists, and researchers—Angelica Bolletinari, Giulia Casalini, Diana Georgiou, Laura Guy, Irene Revell, and Amy Tobin—dedicated to exploring resonances of earlier moments of feminist thinking, art, and activism, particularly those from 1970s and 1980s Italy.<sup>4</sup> Staged across four London visual arts venues, the program comprised film screenings, performance, talks, workshops, and a meeting of the Feminist Duration Reading Group. Inspired and challenged by Lonzi's withdrawal and renunciation tactics, we called the program “Now You Can Go.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to Lonzi and Rivolta Femminile, other touchstones were the practices of the Libreria delle donne di Milano (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective), Diotima in Verona, Cooperativa Beato Angelico in Rome, the international Wages for Housework movement, and the work of feminist thinkers associated with these groups, including Adriana Cavarero, Silvia Federici, Lea Melandri, and Luisa Muraro.<sup>6</sup>

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## Generating Feminisms: Italian Feminisms and the “Now You Can Go” Program

The epigraphs are from: Claire Fontaine, “We Are All Clitoridean Women: Notes on Carla Lonzi's Legacy,” *e-flux* 47 (September 2013), at [www.laznia.pl/uploaded/\\_user/LAZNIA\\_1/eflux/booklet\\_47.pdf](http://www.laznia.pl/uploaded/_user/LAZNIA_1/eflux/booklet_47.pdf), as of October 17, 2016; and Alex Martinis Roe, “Dedications #2: The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective,” in “If I Can't Dance I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution,” unpublished handout to participants in Open Reading Group, Amsterdam, 2013, 5.

I am indebted to Fulvia Carnevale of Claire Fontaine, who introduced me to Italian feminisms, with whom I have enjoyed a generative conversation over the past two years, and who encouraged me to “go ahead,” and to members of the “Now You Can Go” planning team, whose collective efforts continue to inspire me.

1. Carla Lonzi, *Vai pure: Dialogo con Pietro Consagra* (Milan: Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1980).

2. Lonzi quoted in Giovanna Zapperi, “Challenging Feminist Art History: Carla Lonzi's Divergent Path,” in *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, ed. Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 108.

3. Lonzi quoted in Francesco Ventrella, “Carla Lonzi's Artwriting and the Resonance of Separatism,” *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21 (2014): 282–87.

4. For “deculturation,” see Claire Fontaine, “We Are All Clitoridean Women: Notes on Carla Lonzi's Legacy,” *e-flux* 47 (September 2013), at [www.laznia.pl/uploaded/\\_user/LAZNIA\\_1/eflux/booklet\\_47.pdf](http://www.laznia.pl/uploaded/_user/LAZNIA_1/eflux/booklet_47.pdf), as of October 17, 2016.

5. See “Now You Can Go: About,” at <http://nowyoucango.tumblr.com/about>, as of October 17, 2016.

6. On the Cooperativa Beato Angelico, see Katia Almerini's talk during the “Herstories from Italy” panel, at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryqrrSD4nFY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryqrrSD4nFY), as of October 17, 2016.



**Jacqueline Vodoz, housewarming party, Venice, 1976** (photograph by Jacqueline Vodoz, © Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese). Members of Rivolta Femminile gather for a party in Vodoz's new flat in Venice; from left, Carla Lonzi, Renata Gessner, Laura Lepetit, Adriana Bottini, Liliana Padovani (standing), Maria Grazia Chinese, Anna Jaquinta, and Maria Veglia.

Image description: Black-and-white photograph of a woman standing among a circle of seated women who are listening to her speak.

## Hidden from Herstory

A degree of speculation underscored the program's focus, given that Lonzi's *Vai pure* has never been translated into English. Indeed, little of Italian feminism's rich literature has been disseminated within anglophone contexts, if translated at all.<sup>7</sup> Most Italian feminists with an international profile have worked in the United States. Federici, for instance, received a PhD from the University of Buffalo and has taught at Hofstra University; her activities with Wages for Housework and subsequent articulations of feminized labor, social reproduction, and the commons have enjoyed a recent resurgence of interest. The philosopher Cavarero, while based in Verona, has taught at US institutions including the University of California, Berkeley, and New York University and has an ongoing dialogue on ethics, politics, and relationality with Judith Butler. Even when key texts have been translated into English, anglophone commentators have often dismissed Italian feminist practice as essentialist in its articulation of "sexual difference." As noted by Teresa de Lauretis, another prominent US-based Italian scholar, and herself a key mediator between Italian and North American feminisms, the positive qualities of strength and autonomy with which Italian feminists associate separatist tactics are not shared in US contexts, where separatism's negative connotations link to feminists' fears of "loss of professional status, loss of heterosexist privilege, or loss of community identity."<sup>8</sup>

Italian feminists' rejection of equal rights and mainstream assimilation also prevented the movement's easy acceptance within anglophone circles. Rivolta Femminile's polemic "Sputiamo su Hegel" ("Let's Spit on Hegel") declared, "Equality is what is offered as legal rights to colonized people. And what is imposed on them as culture."<sup>9</sup> This rejection of equality, coupled with the forging of links between theory and practice, posed "both a radical challenge to feminism as the struggle for equality with men, and to the notion of politics understood as the struggle for power," Susanna Scarparo asserts.<sup>10</sup> In Linda M. J. Zerilli's view, it is Italian feminisms' understanding of freedom as "a creative and collective practice of world-building, fundamentally inaugural in character, which establishes irreducibly contingent, politically significant relationships among women as

7. English translations of key texts from the movement include *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991); *The Lonely Mirror: Italian Perspectives on Feminist Theory*, ed. Sandra Kemp and Paola Bono (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, trans. Patrizia Cicogna and Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); and *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference*, ed. Graziella Parati and Rebecca J. West (London and Mississauga: Associated University Presses, 2002).
8. Teresa de Lauretis, "The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy: An Introductory Essay," in *Sexual Difference*.
9. Rivolta Femminile, "Let's Spit on Hegel," in *Italian Feminist Thought*, 41.
10. Susanna Scarparo, "In the Name of the Mother: Sexual Difference and the Practice of 'Entrustment,'" *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (September 2005): 37.
11. Linda M. G. Zerilli, "Feminists Make Promises: The Milan Collective's Sexual Difference and the Project of World-Building," in *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 93–94.
12. Alex Martinis Roe's long-term artistic research



**Claire Fontaine, *Taci, anzi parla* Brickbat, 2015**, brick, brick fragments, glue, and archival digital print, 6 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 2 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (16.9 x 12.2 x 6 cm) (photograph by Claire Fontaine).

Image description: A thick booklike object propped upright on a gray table. The cover of the book is green, the author is Carla Lonzi and the title is *Taci, Anzi Parla: Diario di Una Femminista*.

project *To Become Two* (2014–16) maps the relations between and within various collectives and currents that produce and distribute feminist theory in Europe and Australia, and which share a genealogy to or were part of early-to-mid-1970s sexual difference feminism.

13. For instance, Italian feminisms do not feature in Amelia Jones, *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York and Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010); in Hilary Robinson, *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968–2014*, 2nd ed. (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015). The movement is represented minimally in Suzanne Santoro's 1974 "Towards New Expression," and my edited volume *Art and Feminism* (London: Phaidon, 2001) features none of the movement's rich critical literature.

14. See Maura Reilly, "Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures, and Fixes," *ArtNews*, 2015, at [www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/](http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/), as of October 17, 2016.

15. See Lea Melandri, "Autonomy and the Need for Love: Carla Lonzi, *Vai pure*," *MAY* 4 (June 2010): 73–77.

16. *Getting Rid of Ourselves*, Onsite, OCAD University, Toronto, July 16–October 11, 2014. Fulvia Carnevale and James Thornhill established Claire Fontaine as a "readymade artist" in 2004.

17. Claire Fontaine refers to Herman Melville's character Bartleby the Scrivener in "Existential Metonymy and Imperceptible Abstractions," *Human Strike Has Already Begun and Other Writings* (London: Mute and Post-Media Lab, 2013), 56. See also Tiqqin, "Sonogram of a Potential," *Caring Labor: An Archive*, 2010, at <https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/10/31/tiqqun-2-sonogram->

sexual beings who otherwise have none apart from their place in the masculine economy of exchange" that so diverges from liberal democratic US definitions of freedom in terms of individualism and constitutional rights.<sup>11</sup> Italian feminism is not just little-known internationally, in Italy it is also often overlooked. Several Italian women who participated in "Now You Can Go" remarked on the irony of traveling to London in order to explore Italy's feminist legacies.<sup>12</sup>

Italian feminism's minimal presence within English-language anthologies of feminist art and visual culture is particularly notable, and problematic, given the high number of artists and arts professionals participating in the movement.<sup>13</sup> Committed to inventing new forms of expression, Italian feminists also attacked the art world's sexual division of labor and its gendered assumptions about creativity. This critique remains compelling today when female versus male artists' work is underpriced, underexhibited, and undercollected, while the workforce is dominated by female employees carrying out supporting, poorly paid roles.<sup>14</sup> Lonzi, in *Vai pure*, expresses her frustration at being expected to take a supportive role in relation to her male partner and at the value placed on male creativity over female immanence and complementarity implied by that assumption. While Consagra depends on Lonzi's affective labor and consoling company, he prioritizes the time that he spends working in the studio and promoting his career, putting "art" and production above "life."<sup>15</sup>

My introduction to Italian feminisms came via the artist Claire Fontaine when I included her work in an exhibition that I organized called *Getting Rid of Ourselves*.<sup>16</sup> To my invitation that she give an artist's talk, Claire Fontaine replied that she would prefer to speak about practices that informed her work: 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s Italian feminisms. Italian feminist legacies have been important for Claire Fontaine's practice in key ways, including contributing to her formulation of the "human strike." Drawing on tactics of affective resistance developed by Italian feminists, human strike is a protest without fixed goal or mission. Resonating with Bartleby's stance of "I would prefer not to," and with the Italian feminist political principle of *la pratica del partire da sé* ("starting from the self"), human strike resists conventional social roles and expectations, practicing negation in order to activate subjectivity and produce socio-symbolic change.<sup>17</sup>

The feminisms that Claire Fontaine cited, which rejected equality in favor of developing autonomous feminist practices, values, and cultures, feel urgent and necessary in light of feminism's current co-option by corporate and commercial agendas. Cleary feminism's radicalism has been diluted in an era when the current UK Conservative prime minister Theresa May has claimed to belong to a Tory sisterhood, devoted to entrepreneurship and putting women in the boardroom, and Charles Saatchi's gallery organizes an all-women show, *Champagne Life*, that purports to "celebrate the rich and diverse practices of female artists without making a feminist point."<sup>18</sup> Following the talk by Fulvia Carnevale of Claire Fontaine, I formed a reading group in London focused on Italian feminist texts that she had recently published in the French-English journal *MAY*.<sup>19</sup> The reading group informed a two-day symposium called "Feminist Duration in Art and Curating"<sup>20</sup> The symposium's name borrowed from Amelia Jones's account of the durational work entailed in maintaining queer feminist histories, which "reactivates them by returning them to process and embodiment—linking the interpreting body of the present with the bodies referenced or performed in the past."<sup>21</sup> The notion of



**Participants in “Feeling Backwards” workshop, 2015** (photograph by Christian Luebbert). Nina Wakeford led the workshop at Raven Row, London, as part of “Now You Can Go,” December 8, 2015.

Image description: A group of women sit around a table covered with equipment and notebooks. They look to be deep in discussion.

of-a-potential/, as of October 23, 2017. Tiquun is a collective of which Fulvia Carnevale of Claire Fontaine was a member; it cites Italian feminist thinking about reproductive politics and subjective liberation.

18. *Champagne Life*, Saatchi Gallery, London, October 1–29, 2016, at [www.saatchigallery.com/artists/champagne-life/](http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/champagne-life/), as of October 18, 2016.  
 19. The Italian Feminisms Reading Group explored texts by Carla Lonzi/Rivolta Femminile, Lea Melandri, Antonella Nappi, the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, and Claire Fontaine, in March 2015, at Goldsmiths, University of London. In June 2015, under the name Feminist Duration Reading Group, the forum moved to the public art gallery and workplace/studio complex Space, in Hackney, East London, where it continues to meet each month.

20. “Feminist Duration in Art and Curating” took place at Goldsmiths, University of London, March 16–17, 2015, organized by Andrea Phillips and myself. Contributors were Nella Aarne, Lisa Busby, Kajsa Dahlberg, Giulia Damiani, Dimitra Gkitsa, Claire Fontaine, Melissa Gordon, Catherine Grant, Laura Guy, Shama Khanna, Nina Power, Helena Reckitt, Cristina Thorstenberg Ribas, Emily Rosamond, Louise Shelley, Amy Tobin, and Rehana Zaman; see [www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=8498](http://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=8498), as of October 16, 2016.

21. Amelia Jones, “Queer Feminist Durationality: Time and Materiality as a Means of Resisting Spatial Objectification,” in *Seeing Differently: A*

“duration” highlights the ongoing work of caring for feminist pasts, by curating, archiving, and maintaining those records in ways that dovetail with the feminist reevaluation of housework and social reproductive labor.<sup>22</sup>

### Curating Feminisms, Curating as Feminists: Now You Can Go

Following the symposium, a six-woman planning team formed. Our goals were to expand the reading group in Italian feminisms and to develop a public program outside its original academic context. While I worked as overall coordinator and primary fundraiser, each group member contributed something from her practice—from curating a film screening to running a workshop, proposing a speaker, finding a venue, raising funds, or hosting a meal. My role in creating a framework within which women could realize their energies and desires has echoes of the approach that the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective termed “the practice of authority,” wherein members were encouraged to pursue their own trajectories within the context of the group, without needing to obtain the other women’s prior approval or consensus. This practice seeks to affirm women’s capabilities, and to recognize their different and divergent talents and contributions.

In a related practice of *affidamento*, or entrustment, women in the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective entered into relationships with one another. Rather than follow feminist understandings of relations between women as horizontal and equal, they acknowledged the existence of disparities and differences among women. By so doing, they aimed to free up one another’s desires, realize their potential, and engender collectivity as well as self-actualization. They took as examples *affidamento* relationships between female literary characters as well as women writers, such as that between H.D. and Bryher. When H.D. expressed doubts about the validity of visions she had, Bryher responded “without hesitating, ‘Go ahead.’”<sup>23</sup> Thus, instead of being treated as objects of patriarchal exchange, *affidamento* positions women as subjects of mutual symbolic transaction, a reorientation that enables them to discover their value as a collective resource that they can rely on in each other.



**Cover and interior pages from Carla Lonzi's 1969 book *Autoritratto* (Self-Portrait),** at "Carla Lonzi Teach-In," 2015 (photographs by Ehyrn Torrell) Teresa Kittler led the event at Raven Row, London, as part of "Now You Can Go," December 10, 2015.

Image description: A book and a black-covered notebook sit in the lap of a person wearing blue jeans. The book's title is *Autoritratto*, and the author Carla Lonzi. In the second photo, a hand holds the book open to black-and-white photographs.

*History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge, 2012), 174.

22. For an elaboration of social reproduction's relevance for art history and curating, see Victoria Horne and Lara Perry, introduction to *Feminist Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017); and the discussion by Victoria Horne, Kirsten Lloyd, Jenny Richards, and Catherine Spencer, "Taking Care: Feminist Curatorial Past, Present and Futures," in *On Curating* 29 (2016), at [www.on-curating.org/issue-29.html#.WgN\\_9zOZOgG](http://www.on-curating.org/issue-29.html#.WgN_9zOZOgG), as of October 18, 2016.

23. Bryher quoted in Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 115. Both H.D. and Bryher were novelist/poets who wrote under pen names (Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961, and Annie Winifred Ellerman, 1894–1983).

24. Adriana Cavarero, "A Politics of Voices," *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 196.

25. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 191.  
26. *Ibid.*

"Now You Can Go" emphasized embodied experience, intimacy, dialogue, and participation above spectacle and representation. Workshops ranged from Nina Wakeford's "Feeling Backwards," which revisited oral history and interview methods from a lesbian herstory archive, to Kajsa Dahlberg and Guy's "Intimate Acts" exploring collective forms of annotation, translation, and recontextualization.

As part of The Showroom's Communal Knowledge program, Carla Cruz devised a workshop on group behavior at King Solomon Academy, while Andrea Francke drew on social reproduction theory for a session with Justice for Domestic Workers. Foregrounding Italian feminisms' prioritization of group activities and intimate relations and what the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective called *pratica del fare* (practice of doing), Alex Martinis Roe led a workshop designed to stimulate new feminist generations. Aply titled "Our Future Network," the workshop included exercises that emphasized the political role of narration in creating what the philosopher Cavarero calls "a shared space of reciprocal exhibition," positing the collective's world-making practices as pedagogic tools with contemporary relevance.<sup>24</sup>

The politics of citation, both on the literary level of whom and what we read, translate, and reference and the broader sociopolitical questions regarding to whom and what we orient our energies and commitments, underscored the program. A reading group session led by Guy reflected on processes of translating feminisms across time, place, context, and language. It started with Gayatri Spivak's "The Politics of Translation," which warns, "If you are making anything else accessible through a language quickly learned with an idea that you transfer content, then you are betraying the text and showing rather dubious politics."<sup>25</sup> Spivak asserts that the translator must immerse herself in the language and culture of the original text, what she calls its rhetoricity. Spivak's concern about the potential violence enacted when literature is incorporated into a tradition from which it was once excluded, and the dangers of "a too quickly shared feminist notion of accessibility," sounded a valuable note of caution for our enterprise.<sup>26</sup> Turning to translations from Italian into English, we read de Lauretis's introduction to the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective's group-authored book, *Sexual*



**“Rescue Missions: Women’s Art Recovered,” 2015**, panel discussion (photograph by Ehryn Torrell)

Amy Tobin (speaking) chairs a discussion with, from left, Valeria Napoleone, Lisa Panting, Sonia Boyce, and Lois Keidan, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, as part of “Now You Can Go,” December 9, 2015.

Image description: Snapshot of a panel presentation, with five people behind a table on a stage. One of them speaks into a microphone in front of a large screen with a Power Point projection of a grid of black-and-white, photo-booth-style portraits of women, bearing the caption “a portrait of the artist as a housewife.”

27. De Lauretis, 21.

28. The phrase “Don’t think you have any rights” itself comes from a quotation from Simone Weil, which forms the book’s epigraph.

29. Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto* (Bari: De Donato, 1969). The book has been translated into French: Lonzi, *Autoportrait*, trans. Marie-Ange Maire-Vigueur (Zurich: JRP Ringier, and Paris: La Maison rouge, 2012).

30. Curated by Giulia Casalini and Laura Leuzzi, *Autoritratti* took place on December 11, 2015, featuring work made between 1972 and 2013 by Anna Valeria Borsari, Cinzia Cremona, Elisabetta di Sopra, Catherine Elwes, Tina Keane, Ketty La Rocca, Federica Marangoni, Maria Teresa Sartori, and Elaine Shemilt, and readings by Diana Georgiou. See The Showroom: Now You Can Go, at [www.theshowroom.org/events/now-you-can-go](http://www.theshowroom.org/events/now-you-can-go), as of October 16, 2016.

31. *Marinella Pirelli*, curated by Lucia Aspesi with Irene Revell, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, at <https://www.ica.org.uk/whats-on/now-you-can-go-marinella-pirelli-screening>, as of October 17, 2016.

32. Chaired by Amy Tobin, “Rescue Missions: Women’s Art Recovered, Re-enacted, and Recuperated” took place December 9, 2015, and

*Difference*. Emphasizing “the dense substratum of connotations, resonances, and implicit references that the history of a culture has sedimented into the words and phrases of its language,” de Lauretis characterizes translation as a process of rewriting, reconfiguration, and interpretation.”<sup>27</sup>

Tactics of disidentification and withdrawal, inspired by Lonzi’s example as well as those advocated by Rivolta Femminile, the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, and Wages for Housework, informed the discussion “Don’t Believe You Have Any Rights.” The title drew from the original name of the book *Sexual Difference*, which was first published in Italy under the more elaborate (and revelatory) title *Non credere di avere dei diritti: La generazione della libertà femminile nell’idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne* (Don’t Think You Have Any Rights: The Engendering of Female Freedom in the Thought and Vicissitudes of a Women’s Group).<sup>28</sup> The event opened with a screening of Martinis Roe’s 2014 film *A Story from Circolo della rosa*, which concerned an entrustment relationship between two members of the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective.

Throughout “Now You Can Go,” neglected historical ideas, texts, and artworks were revisited in the present, opening up questions about their latency and potential. An evening of artist film screenings entitled *Autoritratti* drew on processes of collage and self-portraiture akin to those performed in Lonzi’s innovative book of interviews with artists, *Autoritratto* (Self-Portrait), 1969, itself the focus of a teaching by Teresa Kittler.<sup>29</sup> The screening staged an intergenerational dialogue between experimental films from Italy, most of which had not screened in the United Kingdom before, and those by UK-based feminist filmmakers.<sup>30</sup> Questions of belated potential were especially pertinent for a presentation of single-channel works by Marinella Pirelli, which took its starting point from a meeting of Pirelli and Lonzi in 1965 and their subsequent dialogue.<sup>31</sup> One of the few women active in the 1960s and 1970s Italian avant-garde, Pirelli had withdrawn her films from circulation, and they had remained stored in a dark basement for over forty years. Conscious of her responsibility, Lucia Aspesi, screening cocurator with Irene Revell and head of Archivio Marinella Pirelli, had been careful to find an appropriate context in which to stage Pirelli’s belated, posthumous, English-language debut.



**“On Social Reproduction,” 2015**, panel discussion and performance (photograph by Christian Luebbert)

From left, Pablo Pakula, Emma Dowling, Dawn Foster, Larne Abse Gogarty, Marissa Begonia (out of frame), and Nic Beurart (on Skype), Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, as part of “Now You Can Go,” December 5, 2015

Image description: A man with brown hair and beard stands on stage wearing a blue apron, yellow rubber gloves, and black high heels. A blue bucket with a mop is placed to one side of his body, attached to his neck by a dog collar and lead. He holds a sheaf of paper in one hand and a microphone in the other, presumably reading from the papers in what looks like a performance on a stage. A laptop computer showing the audience is placed on the ground. The audience is also projected behind the performer. A panel of women is on the right, clapping in reaction to his performance.

featured Sonia Boyce, Lois Keidan, Lisa Panting, and Valeria Napoleone; see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ml\\_yac4CMa8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ml_yac4CMa8), as of October 18, 2015.

33. Lynne Gardner, “Ekow Eshun and the ICA’s Death Blow to Live Art,” *Guardian*, October 23, 2008, at [www.theguardian.com/stage/theatre-blog/2008/oct/23/ica-live-arts-closure](http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatre-blog/2008/oct/23/ica-live-arts-closure), as of February 8, 2017.

34. Chaired by Emma Dowling, “On Social Reproduction: Transforming the Labour of Care and Love,” took place December 5, 2015, and featured Larne Abse Gogarty, Marissa Begonia, Nicholas Beurart (by Skype), and Dawn Foster, with an interruption by Pablo Pakula; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3n5vjndZQw>, as of October 18, 2016.

35. See Emma Dowling, “Love’s Labours Cost: The Political Economy of Intimacy,” Verso, 2016, at [www.versobooks.com/blogs/2499-love-s-labour-s-cost-the-political-economy-of-intimacy](http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2499-love-s-labour-s-cost-the-political-economy-of-intimacy), as of October 18, 2016.

The “Rescue Missions” panel, which also took place at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, highlighted the art world’s “rediscovery” of women artists—often when they are ending their careers or already dead, thus leaving potentially lucrative estates—and the terms on which such revivals occur.<sup>32</sup> Speakers discussed a range of issues concerning the care of female artists’ legacies and careers. The artist Sonia Boyce recalled her effort to make histories of black female singers visible in the artwork series entitled “Dedications.” Gallery co-owner Lisa Panting suggested that commercial art galleries can provide a level of long-term support for artists that public art institutions cannot. Lois Keidan, who led the ICA’s live arts program 1992–97, outlined her ongoing work supporting and archiving feminist live art. Yet the elimination of Keidan’s ICA program by a subsequent director on the grounds that the medium of live art lacked “cultural urgency” went unremarked.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, the participation of the art collector and philanthropist Valeria Napoleone, known for supporting female artists and feminist-oriented arts organizations, rather too neatly illustrated private patronage’s influence on the UK public art sector.

A further panel highlighted the life-giving and sustaining work of social reproduction, from giving birth and raising children, to feeding, clothing, supporting, and protecting the male worker’s well-being. Panelists developed the Italian feminist critique of how Marxist labor analysis devalues social reproductive work in order to maintain daily survival activities and to guarantee labor power’s production.<sup>34</sup> Nic Beurart from the activist group Plan C discussed the failure of the family wage, while the art historian Larne Abse Gogarty highlighted current art-world activism based on boycotts and refusals to work. Marissa Begonia of Justice for Domestic Workers discussed the transnational struggles of migrant workers who often entrust their children to others’ care while they are employed to raise families and manage homes of wealthy people overseas. Picking up on panelist Dawn Foster’s reports on female-led UK anti-austerity housing activism, speakers explored how assumptions that women are “naturally” predisposed to carry out socially reproductive labor have shifted the burden of austerity cuts and capitalist crises onto women’s shoulders.<sup>35</sup>



**“Don’t Think You Have Any Rights: The Challenges of Italian Feminisms,” 2015,** panel discussion (photographs by the author and Ehryn Torrell)

From left, Francesco Ventrella, Zach Blas, Maria Drakopoulou, Fulvia Carnevale of Claire Fontaine, and Giovanna Zapperi, The Showroom, London, as part of “Now You Can Go,” December 12, 2015

Image description: A room crowded with people who face a table at the front with a group of three women and two men in discussion. Behind the speaker is a wall with a projection of a black-white photo.

A detail shows a group of people in a panel discussion, including a man wearing a beanie and black-framed glasses, and three women. The table is filled with a water pitcher, glasses, papers, laptops, and so forth.

An “interruption” by the artist Pablo Pakula gave bodily form to the panel’s themes of socially reproductive labor. Riffing on tasks usually handled by front-of-house and janitorial staff, Pakula welcomed audience members by tearing their tickets and endowing each stub with a lipsticked kiss. Inside the auditorium, he dusted the stage and poured water for panelists. Pakula then moved into the foyer where, with his hands tied behind his back and a feather duster in his mouth, he cleaned the reception desk, bookshop, and lobby. As these activities took place while the panel was under way, they were invisible to audience members and speakers. Returning at the panel’s close, Pakula recited the names of all the support employees who had worked on the event, including cleaning, box office, technical, and administrative staff. As audience members applauded, a live feed from Pakula’s laptop computer projected images of the assembled gathering behind him onscreen.

Wearing a cleaner’s apron over his naked torso, rubber gloves, stilettos, and a dog collar round his neck leashed to a mobile bucket, Pakula’s appearance and actions put a queer spin on low-paid service labor, linking—in this viewer’s mind, at least—support jobs in galleries with sex work.<sup>36</sup> The programming team had initially invited Pakula to make an artwork that highlighted the poor work conditions of ICA support staff, many of whom worked on zero-hours contracts in a nonunionized workplace. Yet once some of these very employees expressed concerns that Pakula’s performance would exacerbate their already precarious situations and jeopardize their efforts to reinstate their trade union, Pakula changed his plans. By performing “invisible” activities with his arms bound and mouth gagged, Pakula evoked some of the behind-the-scenes issues that his performance could not tackle head-on.

Another alteration to the planning process responded to the lack of budget originally allocated for childcare, a particularly acute oversight given the program’s focus on caring labor. Once The Showroom’s director, Emily Pethick, pointed out this omission, we rejiggered our budget and hired Little Kunst, an arts group offering crèche facilities, to provide childcare for daytime events at the

36. Although he does not object to my making this connection, it was not part of Pakula’s intention, which he describes as employing a queer aesthetic, in line with his practice as a solo live artist. Pablo Pakula email correspondence with the author, February 20, 2017.



**Alex Martinis Roe, *Our Future Network*, 2016**, high-definition video, 54 min., still of the proposition *Productive Refusals* developed with Helena Reckitt (artwork © Alex Martinis Roe; photograph provided by the artist)

Image description: A group of four women stands in a gray room, staring back at the viewer. The woman in the center foreground appears to be speaking, and the others are listening. They all wear similarly colored gray sweaters and wear mostly serious expressions on their faces.

gallery. This experience underscores how curatorial attention needs to move beyond the most visible programmatic aspects, to take seriously behind-the-scenes, infrastructural conditions in which curatorial activities occur, and develop long-term conversations and alliances that can inaugurate change.

### Withdrawal and Refusal

Questions about how to withdraw from exploitative systems and gendered roles, within the art world and beyond, resonated throughout the program in talks by artists including Fulvia Carnevale of Claire Fontaine and the scholars Kittler, Marina Vishmidt, and Giovanna Zapperi. In the two-part panel discussion “In or Out: On Leaving the Art World and Other Systems,” artists, curators, and activists exchanged exit motivations and strategies.<sup>37</sup> They questioned how possible it is to renounce mainstream institutions, given that no “outside” exists to which one might flee, and explored the difficulties of leaving situations in which others depend on you and you, in turn, care about the implications that your withdrawal might have on them.

Following her participation in the program, Martinis Roe invited me to take part in a workshop from which she developed her 2016 film *Our Future Network*. Drawing on Lonzi’s withdrawal tactics, Claire Fontaine’s human strike, and Luisa Muraro’s articulation of feminism as a practical philosophy “of those who think through a modification of themselves,” with Martinis Roe I developed the proposition *Productive Refusals*.<sup>38</sup> We proposed that saying no can be a productive way to change existing habits and systems. It can open up new and unexpected possibilities, and change situations for the better. We asked workshop participants to recall a time when they had said yes, but felt that they should have said no, and to consider how they might have said no in ways that proved productive. Participants also reflected on a time that someone had said no to them, and how this in turn opened up possibilities for change. They wrote up possible responses to situations in which saying no would be more productive than yes on calling cards, inspired by those of

37. The two-part panel “In or Out? On Leaving the Artworld and Other Systems,” took place on December 12, 2015. Part 1, chaired by Catherine Grant, featured Carla Cruz, Andrea Francke, and Caroline Russell; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRfPmOwHfwk>, as of October 23, 2017. Part 2, chaired by Gabrielle Moser, featured Karen Di Franco, Karolin Meunier, Raju Rage, and Frances Rifkin; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYIP59ca9e4>, as of October 23, 2017.

38. The quote is from Scarparo, 41.



**“A Feminist Chorus for Feminist Revolt,” performance, 2015** (photograph by Ehryn Torrell)

Lucy Reynolds gathered a distillation of texts from the Feminist Duration Reading Group into a score, which group members performed at The Showroom, London, as part of “Now You Can Go,” December 12, 2015.

Image description: A gallery with people sitting and standing within rows of chairs. It is as though they are performing in the middle of a conference session. The people standing are reading from sheets of paper, books, and, in one instance, a phone. A person standing behind a video camera appears to film them.

39. For how the ideology of passionate work plays out for workers in the creative industries, especially women, see Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016). For discussion of how we have learned and internalized the ideologies of “labors of love” and how we might start to unlearn and collectively withdraw from them, see Danielle Child, Helena Reckitt, and Jenny Richards, “Labours of Love: A Conversation on Art, Gender, and Social Reproduction,” *Third Text* 31, no. 1 (September 2017): 147–68.

40. See Feminist Duration Reading Group page, Space, London, at [www.spacestudios.org.uk/news/feminist-duration-reading-group-feb/](http://www.spacestudios.org.uk/news/feminist-duration-reading-group-feb/), as of February 10, 2017.

41. See “Nuit Blanche 2016,” at [www.monnaie-deparis.fr/en/nuit-blanche-2016](http://www.monnaie-deparis.fr/en/nuit-blanche-2016), as of October 18, 2016.

42. Claire Fontaine, “Weed and the Practice of Liberty,” and “Human Strike between Foreignness and Responsibility,” *MAY* 16 (December 2016): 18–20 and 82–89.

the artist Adrian Piper. Martinis Roe then filmed the participants reading their examples directly to the camera. Our proposition feels pertinent in today’s cultural sector where ideologies of “passionate work” and sacrificial labor accompany the workforce’s feminization and exploitation.<sup>39</sup> It raises the prospect that withdrawing and disidentifying from stereotypical expectations and roles might pose a stronger challenge to these systems than confronting them head-on would do.

### Generating Feminisms

More than other curatorial ventures I have initiated, the impact of “Now You Can Go” has been generative. The Feminist Duration Reading Group continues meeting each month, retaining an emphasis on Italy while investigating other overlooked global feminist lineages.<sup>40</sup> Our desire to learn more about Italian feminisms has prompted us to produce informal “guerrilla” translations of as-yet-unpublished texts, which we read together. A like-minded research group has formed in Toronto. Its name, “The Amalia/Emilia Working Group,” is taken from a story of entrustment between two members of the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective. “Work, Strike, and Self-abolition: Feminist Perspectives on the Act of Creating Freedom,” a follow-up public forum organized by Claire Fontaine, was presented in Paris in October 2016.<sup>41</sup> The event took place in tandem with the second issue of the journal *MAY*, which was inspired by Italian feminisms and included essays by “Now You Can Go” contributors alongside new voices. There Claire Fontaine reflected on the impact of “Now You Can Go” in her editorial, and went on to expand on her concept of the human strike and the “contract of subtraction” within Italian feminisms in the essay “Human Strike between Foreignness and Responsibility.”<sup>42</sup>

In the reading group, rather than expecting participants to digest texts in advance, we read together, paragraph by paragraph, as we make our way around the circle of participants. Originally adopted as a means to encourage people to attend, even if they hadn’t read the assigned texts, this approach creates an atmosphere of collective exploration, stimulated by curiosity and excitement, rather than by expectation and duty. Participants are encouraged to focus their observa-

tions on the text, not in a conservative return to formalism, but in order to unsettle the idea of “experts” and “novices.” This format has affinities with Paulo Freire’s militant pedagogy, which rejects traditional banking theories of education, wherein teachers impart information to passive students.<sup>43</sup> bell hooks discusses Freire’s influence on her development of critical teaching models based on desire and politicized self-actualization.<sup>44</sup> Paola Melchiori describes a similar sense of activation-through-politicization in her account of housewives who gained feminist consciousness while studying in the 150 Hours Schools in Italy from the late 1970s to early 1980s. “The first striking event, in terms of emotional setting, is the reawakening of desire, a ‘sparkly feeling.’ As one woman defined it, like an ‘awakening.’”<sup>45</sup> Having a place where feminist history, ideas, and endeavors are regularly explored helps me to reconcile working in the corporate, neoliberal academic world with my feminist values: if only by directing institutional resources (library loans, photocopiers, scanners, office time) towards feminist ends.<sup>46</sup>

Rather than treating the Italian feminist movement as an object of static study, “Now You Can Go” approached it as a living archive of practices that resonate in the present. The program tried to evoke “what it means to feel as well as look backwards, as well as the question of what counts as evidence of the past,” as Nina Wakeford described her lecture/workshop.<sup>47</sup> Curatorially, the concern was less with presenting artworks—though performance and film featured centrally—than in creating an atmosphere that engendered collective exploration, discussion, and subjective awakening. Characterizing the program’s ambience as laboratory-like, Claire Fontaine suggests that it abolished hierarchies between the visual and conceptual, thus enabling “the question of the life-form to irrupt naturally in the debates: to create artworks, thoughts, modes of existence, agencies . . .” The act of staging convivial, discursive events has a strong female-oriented history, ranging from the salons organized largely by women, especially Jewish women, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, to the consciousness-raising groups that formed a cornerstone of second-wave feminist culture. Viewing the creation of ephemeral conversational gatherings as curatorial efforts can offer an alternative, feminized historiography of curating other than one focused on objects and exhibitions, argues Elke Krasny.<sup>48</sup>

Revisiting Italian feminist practices in a spirit of shared discovery equipped program participants and contributors with tools with which to contest their complicity in systems that celebrate high-status cultural production while simultaneously disavowing the feminized labor and collective efforts that sustain it. The process of developing “Now You Can Go” has stimulated energy to nurture feminist values and build feminist culture. Following Martinis Roe’s suggestion that while acknowledging our precursors we do so in a spirit of dutifully undutiful feminism, we looked outside and interrogated anglophone traditions in order to revisit tools from earlier periods with which to devise new tactics and generate feminist futures.<sup>49</sup>

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43. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

44. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

45. Paola Melchiori, “The ‘Free University of Women’: Reflections on the Conditions for a Feminist Politics of Knowledge,” in *Gender and the Local-Global Nexus: Theory, Research, and Action*, ed. Vasilikie Demos and Marcia Texler Segal, *Advances in Gender Research*, vol. 10 (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2006), 125–44, available at [www.universitadedeladonna.it/english/paola\\_melchiori.htm](http://www.universitadedeladonna.it/english/paola_melchiori.htm), as of October 18, 2016.

46. For a discussion on appropriating institutional time and resources, see Eddy Kent, “Wasting Time: Finding Refuge while the Tenure Clock Ticks,” *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 2, no. 3 (2012): 33–42.

47. “Feeling Backwards,” 2015, at [www.ica.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Now%20You%20Can%20Go%20Full%20Programme.pdf](http://www.ica.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Now%20You%20Can%20Go%20Full%20Programme.pdf), as of February 8, 2017.

48. Claire Fontaine, “Weed and the Practice of Liberty,” 18.

49. Elke Krasny, “The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex,” in *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, ed. Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017).

50. Alex Martinis Roe, “‘Solidarity-in-difference’ and the Politics of Transgenerational Feminism: A Conversation with Alex Martinis Roe,” AQNB, May 8, 2017, at [www.aqnb.com/2017/05/08/solidarity-in-difference-and-the-politics-of-transgenerational-feminism-a-conversation-with-alex-martinis-roe/](http://www.aqnb.com/2017/05/08/solidarity-in-difference-and-the-politics-of-transgenerational-feminism-a-conversation-with-alex-martinis-roe/), AQNB, 2013, as of November 22, 2017.