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Deborah Ardilli holds a Phd in Political Philosophy from the University of Trieste. She works as a translator and as an independent researcher in feminist political theory and the history of the feminist movement. She co-edited, with Stefania Arcara, Valerie Solanas's *Trilogia SCUM* (2017) and contributed with a research on Lotta Femminista (with Marcella Farioli) to the volume *Modena e la stagione dei movimenti: Politica, lotta e militanza negli anni Settanta*, edited by Alberto Molinari (2018). In 2018 she published *Manifesti femministi: Il femminismo radicale attraverso i suoi scritti programmatici (1964–1977)*. Her contributions have appeared in *Il lavoro culturale*, *Nazione Indiana*, *Effimera*, and *Opera Viva*. She regularly writes and translates for the feminist blog *Manastabal*.

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Abstract:

This interview focuses on the recent publication of *Trilogia SCUM* (2017), the Italian translation and retranslation of the complete works by radical lesbian feminist Valerie Solanas (editors Stefania Arcara and Deborah Ardilli). Solanas's publication is discussed as a feminist translation project of care: through the use of abundant paratextual material, and through the restoration of Solanas's uncensored *SCUM Manifesto* (1967), Arcara and Ardilli have joined efforts in reconstituting the legitimacy of Solanas as a feminist writer, a title of which she had been stripped by those who manipulated and discarded her work. The interview also discusses the performativity of this translation project in terms of the discourses and connections it created, and in terms of its importance for current Italian feminisms.

Key words: feminist translation, radical lesbian feminist writing, translation and performativity, Italian feminisms, queer temporality.

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**Valerie Solanas's *Trilogia SCUM*: A feminist translation project of care.
Interview/dialogue with Stefania Arcara and Deborah Ardilli.**

STEFANIA ARCARA, DEBORAH ARDILLI, and MICHELA BALDO

MICHELA BALDO: In 2017, you (Stefania Arcara and Deborah Ardilli) published the volume *Trilogia SCUM*, a collection of works by radical lesbian feminist writer Valerie Solanas.¹ This includes your retranslation (by Deborah and Stefania) of the original uncensored version of Solanas's 1967 *SCUM Manifesto*, which counters the manipulated and severely cut version published without Solanas's permission by Girodias in 1968.² Alongside your new translation of *SCUM Manifesto*, *Trilogia SCUM* contains the first translations by Nicoleugenia Prezzavento of Solanas's comedy *Up Your Ass* (written in 1965), with the title of *In culo a te*, and the short story *A Young Girl's Primer, or How to Attain to the Leisure Class* (written in 1966), with the title of *Come conquistare la classe agiata: Prontuario per fanciulle*.³ Moreover, your edition of *Trilogia SCUM* has been enriched by two essays, one by Arcara, "Chi ha paura di Valerie Solanas?" (Who is afraid of Valerie Solanas?), and one by Ardilli, "Effetto *SCUM*: Valerie Solanas e il femminismo radicale" (*SCUM* effect: Valerie Solanas and radical feminism).⁴ The essay by Arcara focuses on the figure of the working-class dyke Valerie Solanas, a writer who, in the late sixties, supported herself by panhandling and prostitution in New York's Greenwich Village and lived as a "gender outlaw," as "scum"—a subject belonging to the margins of society who opposes heteropatriarchal oppression from that abject position by means of a politically sarcastic and witty writing. It also makes reference to the interest devoted to Solanas by queer theorists such as Paul B. Preciado, Jack Halberstam, and Sam Bourcier, and LGBT drama scholar Sara Warner. The essay by Ardilli, on the other hand, centres on a discussion of Solanas's work from a radical feminist perspective, and looks at the relationship (or absence of a relationship) between Solanas and the feminist movements of her time. Alongside these essays, *Trilogia SCUM* contains a chronology of Solanas's life based on the recent biography of the author published by Breanne Fahs in 2014.⁵ Also included is a list of tributes, texts, performances, songs, videos and films which are inspired by and dedicated to Valerie Solanas's works, as well as some additional notes that clarify translated passages or provide extra relevant information.

This rich paratextual material, that is textual material accompanying the first-time translation or retranslation of Solanas's work, makes this translation project a feminist one, if we follow the principles discussed by feminist translation theorists Luise von Flotow, Sherry Simon, Françoise Massardier-Kenney, Carol Maier in the 1990s, and more recently by Olga Castro and Emek Ergun, among others.⁶ According to the feminist theories elaborated mainly in Canada during the 1990s, a

1. Solanas, *Trilogia SCUM*. The translations included in *Trilogia SCUM* are based on a private collection of Solanas's texts. A digital copy of the 1977 edition of *SCUM Manifesto* (the author's revised version of her original self-published *Manifesto* of 1967), was passed on to the editors by scholars Sara Warner and Mary Jo Watts. An original copy of the same 1977 edition was donated to the Casa Internazionale delle Donne in Rome by Edda Billi on March 10, 2018 (see below).

2. Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* and *S.C.U.M. Manifesto*.

3. Solanas, *Up Your Ass*, *In culo a te*, *A Young Girl's Primer*, and *Conquistare la classe agiata*.

4. Arcara, "Chi ha paura"; Ardilli, "Effetto *SCUM*."

5. Fahs, *Valerie Solanas*.

6. See for example von Flotow, "Feminist Translation" and *Translation and Gender*; Simon, *Gender in Translation*; Massardier-Kenney, "Feminist Translation Practice"; Maier, "Translating Women's Fiction"; Castro, "Horizon in Feminist Translation"; Castro and Ergun, "Introduction." In "Horizon in Feminist Translation," Castro also talks about the concept of "paratranslation," that is the translation of paratextual material in feminist translation (and not only the addition of new material by the translator). "Paratranslation" is obviously a means through which a feminist translator can intervene further in shaping a feminist translation project, although this is an area not reserved exclusively to translators but also to editors, language reviewers and proofreaders. In "Introduction," Castro and Ergun claim it is time to reinstate the term *feminist* as stressed by the Canadian feminist translation school founded in the 1990s, as this term

feminist translation project, a term coined by Sherry Simon, is one that pays specific attention to the idea of recovering feminist work which had been ignored, censored or misinterpreted in order to rewrite the canon, from which that work had been excluded.⁷ In the case of Solanas, we talk of her exclusion (and self-exclusion) from a literary and artistic canon, and even from the history of feminism. Your translation of the uncensored version of *SCUM Manifesto* indeed shows that you paid specific attention to Solanas's obsession with the integrity of her work and the control she almost never had over it. As said above, Solanas had been deprived of such control when a manipulated version of *SCUM Manifesto* was published while she was in prison for shooting pop gay artist Andy Warhol, a version in which the term *scum* had been transformed into the acronym S.C.U.M. (Society for Cutting Up Men). Your translation project is therefore a feminist one because you took care of Solanas's neglected wish of having her original work reinstated, not only in English (something she managed to do herself in 1977 with the publication of the integral text of *SCUM Manifesto*) but also in translation. Moreover, this commitment is also evident in the paratextual material added to the translation, as illustrated above, including the cover photo portraying Solanas in the act of writing, which, in an interview with Barbara Bonomi-Romagnoli, you claimed was chosen to validate Solanas's figure as a writer.⁸ Your use of this paratextual material is in line with feminist translation theories that encourage the adding of prefaces, commentaries, notes and other historical/contextual material to a translated text in order to fully recover the legacy of a writer, and, in this specific case, the legacy of one whose fame had been mainly, if not only, associated with the shooting of Andy Warhol and little else.⁹ In addition, a feminist translation project (using von Flotow's term) is one that pays specific attention to language either by "hijacking" a misogynist text (that is by manipulating it) or by further stressing the feminist and creative aspect of a feminist text.¹⁰ Would you like to comment on your recovery of Solanas's work through the paratextual and maybe also textual strategies that you used?

DEBORAH ARDILLI: Colette Guillaumin once observed that quoting a woman is the exception, quoting her correctly is a miracle.¹¹ Our objective has been precisely that of quoting Solanas correctly, in other words, dealing with the work of a marginal subject by employing the philological

has faded away in studies of translation and gender, and women in translation in the last two decades. Castro and Ergun, however, also point to the need to widen the geographical and interdisciplinary remit of these studies, as previous studies of feminist translation had been limited in geopolitical terms.

7. Simon, *Gender in Translation*. For the notion of recovery, see especially Massardier-Kenney, "Feminist Translation Practice." Feminist translation studies have been particularly concerned with censorship that is often exercised by male translators on work written by women. As stated by Castro in "Horizon in Feminist Translation," the male English translator of Simone de Beauvoir, Howard Parshley, left out fifteen per cent of the French source text in the first volume and omitted sixty pages in the second to avoid topics uncomfortable for him, such as women's achievements in history, mention of women who challenged gender stereotypes, lesbian relationships, references to the burden of domestic housework undertaken by women, etc.

8. Bonomi-Romagnoli, "La vera storia."

9. For the use of commentaries and especially added documentation as part of a feminist translation project see translation theorist Carol Maier, "Issues in the Practice of Translating Women's Fiction" In this text, Maier expressly states that for a feminist translator the question of supplementary material added to the translation is fundamental as it allows the translator "to comment on both author and translator and to stress the relation between that work and feminist principles and practice." Maier also stresses the fact that it is precisely in the notes, afterword and introductions that "the most-decided recovering" of feminist work occurs, 107. See also Godayol Nogué, "Interviewing Carol Maier," 155.

10. von Flotow, "Feminist Translation," 74, 78, and *Translation and Gender*, 82–83.

11. "Une femme citée: c'est l'exception, une femme citée avec la précision comme les auteurs (qui eux sont des homes et ont droit de nature à toutes les précisions vouloues en general): c'est le miracle." Guillaumin, "De la transparence," 52. Translated into English by Deborah Ardilli.

rigour usually reserved to canonical authors. However, it must be pointed out that, for us, “philological rigour” is not synonymous with “objectivity”: feminism has taught us to respect the truth that emerges from the lowest point of the social hierarchy instituted by gender, which is obviously not recognised as “objective truth.” *Trilogia SCUM* is the only complete critical edition of Solanas's writings: besides a new translation of the *Manifesto*, it offers the first Italian translation of her two works, previously unknown in Italy, the short story *A Young Girl's Primer*, and the comedy *Up Your Ass*. To this date, there is no English complete edition of her works.

The philological rigour required to understand Solanas's writing implies tracing the connection between the texts and the life of the woman who wrote them. This is why we have paid a great deal of attention to Solanas's life story—too often reduced to the fifteen minutes of celebrity for her shooting of Andy Warhol—and in order to do this we have used the groundbreaking work by biographer Breanne Fahs, with whom we have also corresponded. Few people know that the violence Solanas experienced in her life (abused by her father and stepfather, two pregnancies when she was a teenager, a forced hysterectomy during her confinement in a psychiatric hospital, and the list goes on) was much greater than the violence she is remembered for exerting. Our intention has been that of restoring the dimension of (in her case, solitary) consciousness-raising to Solanas's writings, which places them by right in the history of feminism.

STEFANIA ARCARA: As for our translation strategies, quoting Solanas correctly has meant starting from a philological scrutiny of the source text. We noticed that previous Italian translations of *SCUM Manifesto* omitted sentences and passages, as they were based on the edition manipulated by the publisher Maurice Girodias in 1968, in the aftermath of the Warhol shooting. We were able, as you already mentioned, to work on the “original” source text, that is, the text edited and approved by Solanas in 1977. That this is the “original” is emphasized, in capital letters, by Solanas herself, who signed off the text with the sentence “This is the CORRECT Valerie Solanas edition.” This emphatic statement may be better understood as the outcome of years of frustration that the author experienced after seeing her words manipulated and her text exploited by publishers and intellectuals, while she was interned in mental institutions or continued to live in poverty.

DA: We also noticed a number of problems with previous translations: in some cases they did not convey the impact of Solanas's use of slang and the linguistic register she chose; in other cases, there were flagrant misunderstandings of the original meaning, resulting in a blatant distortion of her political message. Solanas, for example, writes that “in a female society the only Art, the only Culture, will be conceited, kookie, funky, females grooving on each other.”¹² This sentence had been misunderstood and erroneously translated into Italian as if the author were merely invoking a “female” type of art or culture, or the inclusion of women artists in the canon. But here it would seem that Solanas is saying something completely different and much more radical, which is consistent with the rest of her anti-patriarchal critique in the *Manifesto*: she clearly affirms that, in a society freed from male domination, the life of women *itself* will be a source of pleasure and self-realization, and that there will be no need for the imaginary compensations of an art system. Literally, there will be no need for “Art,” as we know it, since women's life itself will be culturally meaningful. This is why Solanas writes “the only Art...will be...females grooving on each other.”¹³

MB: The attention you paid to the translation and editing of Solanas's work shows that a feminist translation project tells us something not only about a specific text but also about the translator/s

12. Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, 4.

13. Solanas, 4. Our emphasis.

who is/are involved in that project. Paratextual material, especially prefaces, commentaries, afterword, and so forth, often represent an ideal space for translators to politically position themselves, as stated by theorists of activist translation, and thus to better contextualize their translation endeavor for their readership.¹⁴ Moreover, my personal interest and studies on the unexplored notions of affect and emotions in activist translation, especially queer feminist translation, show me that translation in this context is traversed by strong emotions and desires. My question is thus: how was/is *Trilogia SCUM* related to your personal/political involvement with feminist activism in Italy? How has this involvement, and the emotions related to it, helped you in shaping this specific project?

DA: Our interest in Solanas's writing and other feminist texts stems from our long standing commitment to feminist politics and activism. *Trilogia SCUM* is the result of a personal-political relationship between Stefania Arcara and myself, and of our friendship with the other translator, Nicoleugenia Prezzavento. Once the book was finished, during the book presentation tour in Italy, other important relationships developed. I'm thinking of, for example, the friendship and collaboration with Chiara Pergola. Chiara is from Modena, like me, but we had never come across each other. I met her when Giuliana Pincelli invited us to present the book in Modena. Giuliana was an important feminist activist in Modena's 1970s group Lotta Femminista (Feminist Struggle) along with Emma Pattarin, Chiara Pergola's mother. Giuliana suggested that we add a discussion on the reception of *SCUM Manifesto* as presented in the work of artist Chiara Fumai (1978–2017). We welcomed the idea, so organized a joint presentation in Modena with Chiara Pergola, one of the few living Italian artists to call herself a feminist. She focused in particular on the use made by Fumai of Solanas's concept of "unwork."¹⁵ She also developed an original analysis of the relation between implicit and manifest violence, which is embedded in the patriarchal art system. I personally feel that it is very important that this aspect of Solanas's legacy be adequately underlined, noting that Chiara Pergola's contribution has been crucial in this sense. We have repeated the experiment of the joint presentation of *Trilogia SCUM* at Libreria delle Donne (Women's Library) in Bologna and we will do so in Florence soon. I think it is not a coincidence that the re-discovery of these parts of radical feminism take place through personal and political relationships outside the circles of academia.

SA: At the presentation of *Trilogia SCUM* at the Casa Internazionale delle Donne (International Women's House) in Rome on March 10, 2018, our encounter with lesbian feminist Edda Billi from the legendary 1970s Roman Collettivo Pompeo Magno (Pompeo Magno Collective) was a very moving and, at the same time, thrilling experience. She had been in correspondence with Solanas in the late 1970s when Solanas was contacting a number of Italian feminists to enquire about unauthorized Italian translations of her work. Solanas sent an autographed copy of *SCUM* to Edda who presented it, preciously framed as a gift, to the Casa Internazionale when we were there. So, there are pictures of the original 1977 edition autographed by Solanas next to our 2017 edition of *Trilogia SCUM*. This made us feel very honoured as our book was a way of facilitating justice for Valerie Solanas more than fifty years later.

Speaking about Solanas and emotions, I found the audience reactions to the performative readings we held at our presentations extremely interesting. As anyone who has read Solanas knows, she is a very funny writer: she uses humour and a cutting sarcasm in order to critique power relations based on gender. When the funniest passages from *SCUM Manifesto*, *A Young Girl's Primer*,

14. See for example Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*, and "The Space and Time"; Baker, *Translation and Conflict*, "Translation as Alternative Space"; Wolf, "The Sociology of Translation."

15. Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, 6.

or *Up Your Ass* were read aloud, we noticed different reactions from the audience: the few men that were present were generally more embarrassed than amused, with the exception of the gay men, while the women, especially the groups of lesbians, burst out laughing with a liberatory laugh.

MB: You mention some of the numerous presentations of *Trilogia SCUM*, which have taken place in various venues all over Italy in the last year and a half. Judging from the vitality, emotions and connections that these presentations have produced, we can talk of the “performativity of translation.” This concept has been highlighted in translation studies in the last few years following the coinage of the term *performative turn*, and is used to refer to the productivity of translation.¹⁶ Thinking of translation as performative means that it can transform not only the source text but also the environment in which such translation is received, as the trajectory of a translation can often take unexpected paths and create new connections among people, ideas, objects and so forth. Alongside this, a lot of reviews have appeared in magazines, newspapers and online websites, which have started debates and discourses on the importance of Solanas’ work for current feminisms in Italy. Indeed, as mentioned above, Solanas tackles the theme of heteropatriarchal violence at many levels, a topic that has prominently been brought to the fore by many current Italian feminist collectives, including the feminist movement Non Una di Meno.

Through the use of a series of textual and paratextual strategies, Maria Tymoczko argues that those translators who are politically mobilized “often become founders of discursivity”; that is, they are not merely importing new discourses into a target culture but instead initiating new ones.¹⁷ Can you comment further on the afterlife of this translation project in the light of debates arising from, or associated with, *Trilogia SCUM*?

DA: Without *Trilogia SCUM*, my latest work—*Manifesti femministi: Il femminismo radicale attraverso i suoi scritti programmatici (1964–1977)*—which I edited for the same publishers, Vanda/Morellini, would not have come into being. We have no control, of course, on the afterlife and the effects of these books.¹⁸ As historian Luisa Passerini once noted, each work of cultural transmission must assume the position of “unrequited love”—in other words, it must take into account the risk of communicative failure.¹⁹ What I hope is that the existence of these volumes will make it more difficult to dismiss radical feminism as a done with, outdated and “essentialist” experience that has no relevance for us today.

MB: In the last part of your essay on Valerie Solanas, Stefania, you discuss the increased interest among queer theorists in academia for the figure of Solanas as a forerunner of political and artistic queer and feminist practice. When Solanas stresses that she belongs to the scum of society, we can consider her then as a queer feminist if we take into account, as a starting point, the derogatory meaning of *queer* which was used as a slur and reclaimed as a political term by Queer Nation in New York in the 1990s.²⁰ We could also think of Solanas’s work as queering our understanding of temporality in relation to feminist and queer movements of the past. If we follow Elizabeth Freeman’s notion of “queer temporality,” and resist our tendency to consider history in terms of

16. See Bigliazzi, Kofler, and Ambrosi, “Introduction to *Theater and Translation*,” 1–4. The term was first used in 2013 by these three scholars in the introduction to their edited volume on theatre translation.

17. Tymoczko, “The Space and Time,” 231.

18. Ardilli, *Manifesti femministi*.

19. “Una trasmissione che voglia situarsi nella libertà deve partire da un luogo di amore non corrisposto.” Passerini, *Storie di donne*, 12. Translation into English by Deborah Ardilli.

20. Queer Nation was formed by HIV/AIDS activists and was meant to contrast strikingly with the assimilationist agenda of other gay rights organizations.

linear progression, Solanas's work can be seen as very much relevant now, as Deborah points out above, despite having originated before the second big feminist wave in the USA.²¹ Solanas's work indeed questions and *queers* dominant paradigms that emphasise progression from past to present, that is from a feminist wave (second wave) to another one (third or fourth wave) dominated by a theoretical underpinning of queer theory. However, since its inception, queer has acquired a plethora of contrasting meanings, and has mostly been associated with academia. Given that Valerie Solanas was an anti-establishment lesbian feminist, can we still use queer to define her? And, if so, how and why should we do it?

SA: As you rightly notice, queer theory has been associated with academia. This is why in the section of my essay entitled "Postilla: Valerie Solanas e l'élite accademica" I mention the few references that queer scholars Preciado, Halberstam, and Bourcier have made to Solanas (as emerges from her *Manifesto*, Solanas was fiercely critical of the selective system of academia).²² Actually, the only reference to Solanas that I find interesting among queer theorists is Halberstam's evocation of a "queer archive of negativity" which stresses the importance of anti-social women writers and artists who have been excluded from the queer canon, such as Solanas herself.²³ However, since this queer canon also proudly includes Andy Warhol, I would be cautious when throwing Solanas into the same bunch. I find Bourcier's brief mention of Solanas, in French, as "un genderfucker" especially problematic: apart from the fact that Solanas would never use a masculine article to refer to herself, Bourcier's notion of "fucking with gender," that is individual acts of sabotage of *cultural* gender norms and codes of self-expression without ever naming the dominant pole in the gender social hierarchy, is a far cry from the political analysis forcefully put forward by Solanas in *SCUM Manifesto* and in the rest of her writings.²⁴ In my opinion, the limit of Bourcier's and other queer theorists' approach lies in the fact that they tend to emphasise individual identity while emptying the concept of gender of its political import as a hierarchical division between social (not natural) groups (men and women). What I have tried to argue in my introductory essay is that Solanas had a very lucid notion of power relations, and was less interested in playing with identities. This is why I agree with you that her thought, which originated before the so called second wave, is relevant now: in my opinion reading Solanas today helps to disrupt the common progressive narrative of constant advancement expressed with the wave metaphor, and sheds light on key political concepts for a feminist struggle.

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21. Freeman, *Time Binds*. For Freeman queering temporality means inverting the tendency to look at the past as something anachronistic, preferring instead to look to the past's "undetoned" (62) energy in an attempt to oppose linear and heteronormative narratives of progress, which discard the past as something we have definitely done with.

22. Arcara, "Chi ha paura," 30–33.

23. Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 109–10.

24. Bourcier, *Homo Incorporated*, 69–70.

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