

## English Corner

Traduzioni a cura di  
Ilaria Da Col



### Lei: Portrait Ritratto di Lei

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a conversation with  
Chiara Valerio  
Writer

You work as a writer, translator, editorial editor, art director, radio presenter, editor-in-chief for Marsilio... That's quite a long list, and the web adds even more jobs. How do you introduce yourself? As someone who reads for a living. Even when I write. One who then interprets reading in many different ways. I feel like I have always written and read – first on the walls, then on paper, now mostly on screen.

In many interviews you tell of your childhood in Scauri, but Mina Monroy, heroine of your latest book *Così per sempre* (“Like This, Forever”), lives in Venice. What does this city represent for you? What do you think it needs?

I think I'm in love with Venice. I love spending time there. Its tides remind me that we are all (some of us more) subject to mood swings; it brings me back to my adolescence in Scauri, when I used to walk continuously for miles. It makes me feel *in* time, because every corner has at least six stratifications; it tells me that we're an

arrogant species but that sometimes our arrogance in changing what surrounds us is also a wonder, thus reminding me that nothing can be black or white. Everything is mixed, everything is reflux, everything is miasma. Luckily, there's also some breeze now and then.

Mina Monroy decides to open a beauty salon in Venice where “one can stop time”. Is it possible? Is it worth stopping moments forever or, as you have written, all creative processes need change?

Mina wants nothing to change because if everything remains like it is, so will her privileges. She only cares about herself, not about the rest of the world. She's been wounded, and she wants her wounds. Mina is everything about human beings that repels me: stupidity, modest interests, modest ambitions, common pains told as tragedies, dissatisfactions that can't be named as incapacity or impossibility.

Dogs or cats? This is a question that helps to better understand an individual. I know your literary and personal world has always been populated by felines... this one is called Zibetto, and it has been written that it echoes Bulgakov and Dylan Dog but perhaps also your cat Miles... What does this passion mean to you?

I've always had cats. These animals teach patience... and love, if they are different things – because you can't impose yourself on a cat, you have to wait for it to choose you. Zibetto is Count Dracula's cat, and it's the character who carries the story in *Così per sempre*, unseen. I wanted this vampire Earl to have a cat next to him, a *famulus*, like a witch. Wizards deal with spells, witches with potions as they stir, and the Earl stirs and mixes the blood like a witch, so he needed a cat. It certainly stands for Azazel as well as for Miles and Bastet. It's all the cats I have stroked and read about – but mostly Miles.

We know that you have a mathematician background, and in *La matematica è politica* (“Mathematics is Politics”) you refer to your roots; in this short essay, an intriguing paragraph is entitled “Education is Horizontal, Culture

is Vertical”: what do you mean?

I meant that education is a constitutional right while culture is a choice. I thought that was funny, now I have to think if it still amuses me.

In your novel *Il cuore non si vede* (“Heart Cannot Be Seen”), the protagonist literally finds himself without this organ, in a post-human perspective that is reminiscent of some contemporary artists who contradict by facts the Freudian assertion that ‘anatomy is destiny’. What is your position in this debate?

I try to avoid debates. Although I do read psychoanalysis texts, from Freud to Matte-Blanco to Alessandra Ginzburg (and I have some psychoanalysts friends), although the Earl's best friend in *Così per sempre* is Carl-Gustav Jung, my relationship with psychoanalysis isn't that good. It seems to me that it has contributed to the transformation from readers to speakers; it's just an intuition, a too general statement. After all, the 19th century vampire of Polidori and Stocker is one of the last pre-Freud characters, conveying a kind of collective drama, a common fear, a shared spectre; from then on, each of us has their personal fear variation on recurring themes. For most of human history, we've told or listened to other people's lives in order to accept our own, while now it seems to me that we tell our life in order to accept the others'. It's cringe, isn't it? *Il cuore non si vede* drives from something I've been wondering since I was a child: “why are there gods and demigods with extra limbs and organs, but no gods and demigods lacking them?”. In classical mythology there are very few examples. I remember I'd asked Maria Grazia Ciani, who replied to me after seven minutes of deep reflection on classical mythology by pointing out the three cases, and eventually told me: “Yes, you're right”. I don't believe that the heart of protagonist Andrea Dileva is missing: what I believe is that neither he, nor the others, nor the available diagnostic instruments can see it – it's either too big or too small. Anatomy is such a destiny that all we do is try to change it with surgery and pharmacology. I think we've always been pre – and post-human, but now we can more promptly control this time-line – which is also a causality line.

In your work as well as in your personal story, one feels a little reluctance to all that is normative. You wrote that mathematics was your apprenticeship to revolution. What does it mean to make a revolution today?

It means what it has always meant, or at least from Copernicus onwards, so accepting that everything is epistemology, in other words, a theory of knowledge in which some questions and answers are allowed, while others are not. This implies that what seems eternal can indeed be tuned, changed, or subverted. Referring back to Mina, if things stand still, privileges are always the same and for the same individuals.

An element that fascinates me a lot in your works seems contradictory at first sight: it's the relationship between the civil value of mathematics and the openness to the illogical and mystery that reason cannot explain... How do these things fit together?

Everything is a mystery to me, Silvia. I answer you just like Siri does when I ask her if she believes in God. I'm not sure that logical and illogical, reason and feelings can be separated. I certainly can't – for me it's easier to switch from millimetres to light years than to separate the logical from the illogical. As far as civic value is concerned, it's easy enough to establish absolute and temporary rules everyone agrees to respect, and mathematics turns useful to adhere to them, though perhaps my answer is due to the fact that I've done this exercise for many years.

Chiara Valerio

Chiara Valerio (Scauri, 1978) has written novels, short stories, literary criticism and theatre. Her latest book is *Technology is religion* (Einaudi, 2023). She collaborates with *La Repubblica* and *Vanity Fair*. She curates Radio 3's programmes *Ad alta voce* (with Fabiana Carobolante) and *L'isola deserta*. For the publishing house Nottetempo she has translated and edited *Flush, Freshwater* and *Between the Acts* by Virginia Woolf, and *Is the Atlantic Enough for You?* (Letters between Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey with Alessandro Giammei). Her books and writings are translated in several countries. She is Head of Italian fiction at Marsilio publishing house. She holds a PhD in Probability Calculus.

## **My Skills** **Capacità al centro**

edited by  
**Laura Cortellazzo**

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and **Sara Bonesso**

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### **The role of relationships in the development of behavioural competences: exploring the peer coaching technique**

Developing a behavioural competence means to change one's usual behaviour. In our life, we are naturally tied to habits, i.e., behavioural patterns through which we answer to the variety of stimuli and situations we have to tackle. However, sometimes our *modus operandi* is not the most effective choice.

Changing your behavioural patterns takes time, effort, perseverance, and a certain amount of awareness in order to identify learning goals which are consistent with your professional ambitions, and to self-assess your improvements.

Although developing a behavioural competence is an individual process, some scientific studies highlighted that relations do play a key role in this process. Social interaction represents a crucial resource for learning, because while building an intimate relationship with another person, one can get more energy, a better understanding of oneself, and define more specific goals to achieve. Interaction forces the individual to frame their learning objectives in order to communicate them effectively to others, and gives the chance to get information and opinions about them and the ways to collect them. Moreover, social interactions allow human beings to get external feedback on their past behaviour, as well as they ensure a more objective assessment of the progress related to the behaviour they try to alter.

One of the most used techniques to include social relationships in the individual learning process which aims to develop leadership is peer coaching. Peer coaching is defined as a developmental relationship between two people of

equal status with the clear intention of facilitating their personal or professional development. The stress on the equal status of the individuals involved in the relationship distinguishes peer coaching from mentoring, which involves instead a long-term relationship in which a senior person supports the personal and professional development of a junior person. The mutual benefit of the relationship is what makes peer coaching different from executive coaching, which occurs between a professional providing the service and an individual who receives it. Furthermore, a coach differs from a consultant, because the aim of the former is to ask questions that help one to reflect on their own behaviour, improve self-understanding and find their own answers, while the goal of the latter is to give advice or solve problems. Peer coaching provides various kinds of support, such as reflection support, through the use of questions; procedural support, by investigating possible strategies and action alternatives; and emotional support, by bringing encouragement and motivation in the learning process.

Having a social support activity in the competency development process underlines how not only every individual is responsible for self-learning, but they also can and should positively influence the other's growth. This usually leads to greater involvement in the learning activity: in addition to sharing ideas and experiences, one is encouraged to exercise empathic listening, caring for others and taking responsibility for the progress of another person. But how can this technique be concretely applied in the development of cross-functional competences? The Ca' Foscari Competency Centre experience is an example. Participants are divided into small groups and during the laboratory they are invited to set up interactive sessions in which peers switch roles, each playing once the role of coach and then of coachee. Some guidelines and examples help participants understand how they can carry out the interactive sessions effectively; in particular, the need for the coach to adopt an open, curious and listening attitude is emphasised, and they have to show their interest in what the coachee is sharing, also through non-verbal communication.

Confidentiality of the information exchanged during the session is also important, since peers have to share real episodes in their life in which they experienced the competence they intend to develop. Each participant is also requested to be aware of their commitment to the others. At the end of each peer-coaching session, it is good practice to supplement the activity with a written report on what has emerged, such as the issues addressed, the benefits perceived from the session and the coach's questions that most stimulated reflection – this helps consolidate the learning.

Although one may find it hard at the beginning to start a dialogue with their peers, the technique is generally highly appreciated. As a matter of fact, research on the subject has shown that people feel more comfortable talking about their thoughts and behaviour with someone outside of their friend or family network, because they fear no judgement. Not only do the relationships established during peer coaching foster awareness, but they also help nurture self-confidence and creativity, which are indispensable to successfully tackle a path of change.



### **Lei around the World** **Lei & Mondo**

**Leila Karami**

Translator, Professor at La Sapienza University of Rome, MA in Specialised Translation, Persian curriculum

**a conversation with**  
**Māniā Shafāhi**

Founder, *Senobar* magazine

**First of all, thank you for agreeing to speak to Lei. Let's start with your family environment.**

Having teachers as parents undoubtedly influences your approach to culture in general, be-

cause knowledge automatically becomes a value for you from an early age. I remember a huge wall bookcase in my parents' house and I often saw my father or mother reading. I also remember my dad and my sister competing on car journeys with the verses of classical Persian poets learnt by heart.

**Tell us about your studies.**

I graduated in Environmental and Land Engineering at Tehran University, majoring in Natural Resources Planning and Management; since I was interested in nature, sports, and the environment, I later pursued a MA and PhD in Business Administration in Tourism at Bahar Institute of Higher Education in Mashhad (north-eastern city of Iran).

**Tell us about the origin of *Senobar* and the issues you care most about.**

One thing led to another. In 2018, after fifteen years of employment, I resigned from the company where I was working as a consultant. I was trying to figure things out when I came across Ali Dehbashi, editor of Bokhara magazine, who suggested that I start a magazine about environment, natural resources and tourism. The name 'Senobar', the emblem of the evergreen tree of the Iranian Plateau, also came from this meeting. So, I asked the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for permission to publish, and got it in March of the same year. The magazine management is based on the work of motivated and interested volunteers. I admit I see it as my child, but also the result of teamwork and cooperation with experts, field scholars and nature lovers. The subjects of each issue are based on trending topics and special occasions. For example, the first issue is dedicated to the Iranian New Year (March 21<sup>st</sup>) because it came out in the spring of 2018, but it also contains articles on the water crisis, on Hāmūn and Urumia seasonal lakes, whose drying out changes the bird fauna and forces the inhabitants of the area to migrate, and on the cutting of decades-old trees for the sake of unwise construction in large cities. The second issue collects reports on the soirée dedicated to Mahlaghā Mallāh (1917-2021), who founded in 1993 the NGO 'Women Society Against Pollution of the Environment'. Moreover, each

issue has a space for books, films and documentaries reviews. We also publish personal experiences related to nature; we talk about revalued places, medicinal plants, as well as the damage caused by dams or drained seasonal swamps, among them long-haul sandstorms. Through the magazine we also inform about initiatives in favour of nature, such as the 'V International Mountain Day – Women Move Mountain', which takes place every two years and revolves around mountains and their ecosystems. Last but not least, evergreen topics include environmental pollution, plastic recycling and the harm caused by pesticides on forests.

**Iran is the country whose ancient natural architecture is studied by Iranists around the world: wind towers, *qanāt*, and food refrigeration systems (*sardābe*), just to mention a few.**

Yes, and we should reflect on how we can use this architecture as a model for managing water and natural resources. Today, water management in Iran is totally inappropriate: unrestrained construction in large cities, due to human greediness, is harmful both for nature and for ourselves. One of the tasks we are committed to and which we carry out is to submit reports on environmental damage or recycling to government offices. So far, we have made a lot of progress in terms of raising awareness in smaller municipalities.

### **Māniā Shafāhi**

Born in Sāveh (Iran) in 1978, Māniā Shafāhi is the founder of the quarterly magazine *Senobar* (literally *pine* or *pine-tree*) that has been focusing on nature and environmental issues since 2018, with seventeen issues published so far. Māniā Shafāhi holds a BA degree in Environmental and Land Engineering plus two MA degrees in the field of tourism, and she writes about the enhancement and protection of natural resources. The reasons for founding *Senobar* are stated on its website: "*Senobar*, voice of nature. We aim at updating you on the environment condition and how to improve and preserve it, striving to denounce environmental damage and suggesting ways to protect, preserve and enhance the environment and improve the quality of nature".

## **Innovative Business Tools**

### ***Strumenti innovativi per il mondo del lavoro***

**Miriam Bertoli**

Digital & Content Marketing Strategist, Consultant & trainer

### **Digital Strategies and Tools for the Business World**

*Nowadays, technology is an essential part of all careers, not only the digital ones. The digital revolution affects every industry to a different degree: art, tourism, finance, culture, management, fashion, health, HR, chemistry, agriculture, and so on. The world of work is changing rapidly, and digital skills are key to find a job, start a business, and compete successfully. I am pleased to start with this article a series of contributions in which I'll present digital strategies, skills and tools in digital that are indispensable for business, regardless of the professional field of interest.*

I have chosen to devote this first contribution to an overview of the most important tools and right attitude. It takes up the "Toolbox" format that I had developed in collaboration with Ca' Foscari Career Service and which had brought these skills to hundreds of students in the last years, through seminars, training sessions and the brochure "10 Steps to Build Your Digital Toolbox" (you can download it here in Italian <https://bit.ly/3YIVyXZ>).

So: what are the most important digital tools?

For the sake of clarity, we can divide them into 3 large groups: tools and attitude for finding work, for communicating in a professional context, and for collaborating and managing large and small projects.

For example, through digital we can show part of our identity and make an excellent first professional impression to someone inquiring online before meeting us for an interview. Still, we always have to be carefully aware that the personal aspects we decide to publish, especially in social media, are only a few clicks away from the professional ones.

In this regard, it is important to remember that silence is communication too: a name search on Google or LinkedIn is often the first contact or an opportunity to confirm and expand one's profes-

sional reputation. If there are no results, it is already a first message. LinkedIn is *the* tool to get to know and hone, and it is also a great way to prepare for an interview: you can find out information on the career path of your interviewers, discover and enhance common relationships, find out about company news, major current and future projects, other open positions, and much more.

Staying within the social media sphere, it is also advisable to develop your presence on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, especially for certain careers and industries.

Even for those who think not to use them actively by publishing content, these social networks are invaluable for discovering professional opportunities through word of mouth (WoM), letting people know that you are looking for a job, and staying up-to-date on themed technical content.

A good toolbox contains several digital tools for everyday work and collaborations. One of the most used is the email, to which we often devote a huge part of our working days, along with virtual, hybrid or face-to-face meetings. Good practices for email involve clear and effective communication, starting from the subject line, which should anticipate the content in a direct way.

Regarding time management and the need to maintain sustainable (broadly speaking) professional relationships, I would suggest in particular:

- that you always weigh the need to include one or more people in copy: what is the objective? Is it really necessary to commit their time to reading?
- that you plan the time of sending your emails, a possibility which more and more tools give. Once the message has been prepared, respecting the time of colleagues and co-workers also means avoiding the sending outside working hours, such as late evenings and weekends.

I add to these tools and attitude the knowledge of generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems. We use AI every day without even realizing it; these days, a series of technologies that allow us to create text, video and images at unbelievable speed are rapidly spreading, and our toolbox will have to make room for the new systems that will be launched or

made accessible on a large scale in the coming months, such as GPT and ChatGPT, MidJourney and DALL-E.

At the same time, the tools we use now (like Teams, Zoom and so on) will also be enhanced with small and large automations; indeed, you are already experiencing some of them, for instance when Gmail suggests you what to reply to an email.

We are witnessing the beginning of the intellectual and creative jobs automation process. I have just listed some innovative tools, which in my opinion require to be embraced like any other innovation, i.e., with an *attitude* consisting of: curiosity to explore, courage to test them and make mistakes, and, last but not least, foresight to be able to manage and integrate them *in a creative and non-destructive way* into our professional path.