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What one must give up and what there is to be gained.

*Separatismo* (*separatism*) was the word that made exploring Carla Lonzi's work feel so dangerous; like handling something that has burned you in the past. Shortly after I began researching Carla Lonzi, I interviewed the theorist Helmut Draxler and asked him about the political possibilities of a separatist path. He replied that we were familiar with the autonomy discourses of the 1970's and where they had led (our thoughts turned to Otto Mühl and other commune experiments.) And what about a strategic form of separatism, a -merely *declared* abandonment of the ruling order and its institutions, I asked. Yes, he replied, but only with an awareness of the fact that every separatism would always be a structural part of what it has separated from.

In feminist discourse, gender theory cancelled out the separatist approach—that, The women, the feminists are now leaving the room!, —seemingly long ago insofar as it answered the necessary assumption of two discernable genders with the question: Why do we know about these? Which epistemes are re-enacted here again and again? What knowledge systems are we reproducing through a female *separatism*, a movement obviously bound to gender? This kind of discourse, which presupposes membership of an identity-based group and is called communitarian, along with the consequent inclusions and necessary, therefore often enforced, loyalties, seemed counterproductive in the context of a break with gender attribution of a quasi historical-biological nature. But there was something that made *separatism* so appealing that one wanted to consider it again. Something inside said: Despite everything, they always know! And that means: Even if you are not, they always see you as "woman". And this is where the second term coined by Carla Lonzi came into play: *autocoscienza*, or in English feminist discourse: self-awareness. In Carla Lonzi's introduction to her own *autocoscienza* in her work, *Diario di una femminista* there is the phrase: "*Primo era la risonanza, di Sara in me, di me in Sara,*" (First there was resonance; of Sara in me, of me in Sara) and this phrase contained the realization that whatever one had experienced as seemingly private constraints and insults, had in truth passed through other bodies in the same way: the realization that these were not individual experiences, but that there existed a collective external experience—not born within oneself—of being singled out as women, and thus there existed a group of people, formed and defined by this attribution. This was the main key for the emerging possibility of a *separatism*.

Last night I could not sleep, after reading a newspaper article about a trial for attempted murder. Someone had struck down two women from behind using an iron rod and then smashed up their faces. One of the women managed to escape, but fell over again and again as she ran. In the article the perpetrator was quoted as saying, "I couldn't stop laughing because she kept falling on her face."

I wonder if I will be able to sleep tonight. One thing I am sure of, however, is that the two women were not on the street as "women," but rather as city dwellers minding their own business: human beings, and yes, maybe even women too. On their way through the dark streets, they may have become "women," and if so, it is because they may have been afraid. Yet in this context this observation is pointless, however, because despite their self-image, they were people who were seen as women, and as such, nothing they could have said on that topic would have saved them.

This appellative character beyond any form of self-assessment, now connects *separatism* to more current questions, formulated for example by Black Pessimism. It concerns something that is attributed to someone through no choice of their own, something that brings with it a value system, itself ages old. The fundamental aspect of this value system is that it was not made by those whom it devalues. Nonetheless, as Black Pessimism argues, couldn't it be, that even those who are actually devalued in these cases have gained experiences of that order that might be even more enlightening in structural and systemic terms, than those of the individuals who originally established the order, i.e. the "winners" of that order. And as Fred Moten, a Black Pessimism theorist has put it: Could you now please leave us alone to clarify these experiences amongst ourselves!

Akin to Black Pessimism and the question of skin color as not being identitarian but a description one lives with, this does *not* mean that women (whatever that term might signify) should be clarifying this among themselves. Rather, that those who have had the experience of being identified as women out of the blue should be given time and seclusion to discuss this with one another.

Even more than this reasonable demand, *separatism* practically discards the category of the “woman.” It says, “Just leave us alone,—we, who have not participated in the set up of this drama, of the question of women, of the two sexes and all their characteristics, and who were in any case never the winners in this game you have designed for us; just leave us alone now. Do not look at us; do not ask us about your own contradictions; ask those who are willing to think about such categories. You can continue to use the term women for those who wish to be known by that name. We are just not interested in your categories!” Yet this historic demand has always been counteracted in everyday life by the vague notion that exactly this would not happen (and the MeToo debate has proven this yet again). Those who most vehemently point out that whatever drama was not theirs would be the very ones most likely to be asked to comment on it.

On this point, or premonition, *separatism* can be likened to another concept, which was proposed by Giorgio Agamben in his book on Tiepolo’s frescoes depicting the Neapolitan Commedia dell’Arte figure Pulcinella. Pulcinella, who hatched from an egg, is one of those half human-half beast beings that populate mythology around the world: mid-way between a chicken or turkey and a human, with no clearly discernable sex: the Italian name has a female ending. In all the dramas she is involved in, Pulcinella’s storyline is that she basically does not want to be part of them and therefore makes every effort to leave the stage as quickly as possible. All the situations Pulcinella gets involved in—the dramas between a lover and a married woman, a doctor and a patient, or even, in her most basic form as Punch—a shortened form of Pulcinella—between a police officer and a crocodile—are not the result of Pulcinella’s doing, she has had nothing to do with conceiving them; rather, they present themselves as preformulated before her. She suddenly finds herself in these situations and is required to play along. Meanwhile she would have many more important things to do, and there is always the danger that she will be sidetracked from these activities by these problems of others, and consequently won’t have time for the essential things, all part of a hedonistic subsistence: sleeping, eating, having sex and, above all, eating again.

The drama of all the Pulcinella stories is that she is constantly called in to help (and here the children’s call for Punch, Punch!, mirrors the cries of “Mummy!” in the sand pit). Pulcinella is continually being asked to intervene and offer solutions. And at some point both the audience and Pulcinella realize that the others will not let her go, and that the only way for her to leave the drama is to deal with it. And so it is that Pulcinella usually ends up sorting things out. These narratives seem to suggest that one has to solve the problems of others before being able to go one’s own, separate way, and before one can do what is necessary or essential to one’s own being.

Yet even in the realm of non-essential activities there are nonetheless things that one holds dear, such as art and all the other beautiful things people make and do, and that one would like to do oneself. Italian *separatism* points out that in the field of art, which developed over the centuries with no problems excluding everyone called women, there is actually no space to be found, or in any case, no space which would not also force one into all the other aspects of this concept: competition and hierarchical evaluation, equivalents to the money system and access to the underlying resources.

This gave rise to the idea of giving a different name to the thing: art (literature, music), and thus abandoning art, as it is defined today, along with everything else. And this is precisely where the real, historical problem of *separatism* arises: the question of what one must give up and what there is to be gained.

Carla Lonzi, *Taci, anzi parla. Diario di una femminista*, 1978

Giorgio Agamben, *Pulcinella ovvero Divertimento per li ragazzi*, 2015

All half human-half beasts live amongst us in ambiguity. It can be assumed, however, that they actually live elsewhere, in a place where - since they are the actual population there - they do not understand that they are half

human-half beast, but simply exist as they are: creatures not situated between two categories but in one of their own. There, if people pass by - which I believe to be the case - these passers-by would probably be a mix of these creatures themselves [half human-half beast] and something else. And since humans are less complex than those human-beast beings, people might be seen as a mixture of those creatures and ... a ball. Here, among us, their presence is sometimes mystical, but ubiquitous in popular culture, to the point that they are even played by humans. Why, for example, was it important for Marco Polo to remind us of the existence of some of these beings he had encountered during his trip to China? Historiography preserved his name because of these trips, and because of his first descriptions of China, which he brought to the land that was later to be called Italy.