

Coté, Day, & Utopian Pedagogy Radical Experiments against Neoliberal Globalization
de Peuter

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Edited by

Mark Cote, Richard J.P. Day,
and Greig de Peuter

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INTERVIEWED BY ENDA BROPHY, MARK COTÉ,
AND JENNIFER PYBUS

Translated by Enda Brophy

EB, MC, JP: One of the constant concerns emerging from within the history of the Italian radical left, from Antonio Gramsci's vision of the organic intellectual to *operaismo's* tormented relationship with the party form, is the relationship between intellectuals and movements pushing for radical social change. We would like to begin by asking you to speak to the notion and role of the intellectual, as it was when you began your militancy, and as it is now.

MDC: With regard to this question of what an intellectual is, I think that a person who plays this role within a movement is someone who, having had the possibility to study, to build for herself a set of critical analytical tools, and above all being animated by the will to build something good, a different and better world, poses to herself not so much the problem of her own situation, ignoring that of others, but the problem of the overall conditions of humanity, trying to discover which might be the most crucial matters from where to begin and the paths to be followed in order to transform those conditions. Today, more than ever, we are in a context in which great tragedies and great suffering are plainly evident. In my opinion, therefore, the intellectual is somebody who poses to herself these questions: what is the root cause of all of this, which are the most urgent issues, of which are the most significant subjects to follow and to connect with – and there are many of these – in order to construct opposition, refusal, struggles, and alternative paths. Therefore I would say very simply that the function of the intellectual is this: to put at the disposal of others, to put in common, this greater set of critical analytical tools, to make those tools freely available, and this naturally demands being rooted in a reality that is in movement, a

reality within which the researcher herself puts certain choices into practice, in which she can deem some matters to be more crucial than others. And the hope is, depending on the choices made by all of those who are today committed to transforming that which exists, that there effectively comes about the wide-ranging social transformation of which we are in need. I would like to add that while in the 1970s this broader set of critical analytical tools was accessible to few of us, today, thanks also to newer communication technologies, there is within the movement as a whole a very great and diffuse capacity for analysis, for attaining knowledge of the issues that matter in the world, of the mechanisms that provoke these and of the forces that activate themselves as a result. It is not a coincidence that the movement has had to equip itself in regard to this with a fresh set of analytical tools and new organizational dimensions, ad hoc groups and associations that follow the various issues by computer, radio, or video, in order to sustain a relationship with such a vast and promptly available amount of information, obviously constituted not only by the facts but also by all the analyses and communiqués that circulate. So the 'intellectuality' of the movement is therefore today an extremely widespread condition.

EB, MC, JP: Let's go back in this respect, to the era of *operaismo* and *Potere Operaio* (PO), which you were a part of. Can you discuss your position as a woman within a group, a movement such as PO? What kinds of tensions and affinities were there for you as a feminist within the group, which was so heavily dominated by men? What were the strategies you developed that emerged out of those tensions?

MDC: I should point out that when I began my feminist activity, founding and promoting *Lotta Femminista* – which at the beginning, in June of 1971 in Padova, was called *Movimento di Lotta Femminile* – I left PO. Therefore there was not the problem of how I would operate as a feminist within PO. The militant activity which I carried out as a feminist was a full-time activity that did not permit a double militancy, an issue other women confronted when militating in different organizations. For them, evidently the feminist commitment was of a different kind than ours was, because for us there remained neither the time nor the mental space for any other militancy. But above all, the militancy which we were expressing was intended to offer a radically different viewpoint on the world which, starting from the crucial nature of the labour of reproduction (broadly understood), was bent on reformulating the political discourse and project, and therefore was intended as an

approach that had a general validity. When I became a part of PO in 1967, a feminist movement did not exist and therefore the issue of whether I should enter PO or work in the feminist movement never arose. In Italy at that time there were only the realities of the extraparlimentary groups, and for me, seeking out PO was related – as I said in Rome¹ – to a profound need to find justice.

I was conscious of the fact that there was injustice in the world. I wanted to do something, both to understand its origins – to have therefore the set of analytical tools which would permit me to understand where the injustice that I was seeing in society during that period originated – and to seek to remedy it. I therefore had this double need: to understand, but also to act, a need for militancy. PO answered this need, which was very significant. It was very important to be introduced to the study of *Capital*, to the study of Marx's other works, and to those of Marxist scholars. The first work I read was *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850*. It was a very important work. Therefore, simply being introduced to and studying this theoretical legacy was, I believe, something fundamental, such that I continue to offer extracts of Marx's work to my students.

The other great discovery was that of the factory. I remember that once I went to Marghera,² at that time [Toni] Negri was there also, probably it was the first time, and he said to me ironically, 'witness the beauty of industry'!

For me discovering the factory, such a brutal dimension of life, with that fixity of a condition of labour, being in the same place in order to carry out the same tasks every day of the year, to discover the noxiousness of the factory, the degradation of working-class neighbourhoods ... all of this exposed me not only to an extremely weighty reality from a human point of view, which very many individuals had to confront every day to survive, but it exposed me to that which was the mechanism of capitalistic production. I therefore saw represented that mode of production that was at the origin of human suffering and misery in the time in which I myself lived, the era of capitalist production which had begun approximately five centuries previously. I therefore recognize that this education at PO answered my need, answered my research, and gave me a formidable set of critical tools. On the other hand in the Italy of the day the relationship between man and woman was still quite barbaric ... And this was even more so within militant circles, where intellectual power itself was used against women even as it reinforced cohesion among men. Let us call it ill-employed pride. From this condition of excessive male intellectual power on one side, and of

the non-visibility of women as subjects on the other, there emerged the 'explosion of contradiction' and therefore the emergence within the span of the movements of the time of the feminist movement which, as far as the *Lotta Femminista* offshoot is concerned, without a doubt grew out of the extraparlimentary group *Potere Operaio*. But a quite analogous process came about in *Lotta Continua* as well.³ In any case the image of a woman during the period immediately prior to the emergence of the women's movement was significantly out of focus: a woman oppressed and conditioned by domestic labour, which had yet to be posed as an issue deserving of attention. Her position within the capitalist organization of labour as a subject destined to the labour of reproduction, which was unwaged and therefore not counted as such, had yet to be analysed. Rather, it was perceived as an expression of love or as a mission. This condition was suffered by women largely because there was no adequate interpretative framework, either one that could serve them or one that they could confront men with, a framework that could explain their hardships. There remained unexplained all of the greater labour incurred by the woman who, even when she worked outside the home, retained the domestic responsibilities regardless, and this meant that she had to apply herself in the workplace (as in any other context) in a condition of heavy disparity with respect to that of men. As the reason for this had not been 'brought out,' the woman could not say what the cause of her hardship was and often there flowed from this an abuse of power on the part of men, because of whom – as I said in Rome – many women told me they ran the risk of going insane. At the same time the women's movement, having offered an explanation for their condition, saved them from this fate. Let us keep in mind the social context of Italy as it stood then. In 1971, when we organized the first feminist meeting, the advertising of birth control products was still illegal. There was therefore a prohibitionism regarding a woman's sexuality, a non-recognition of her right to express a sexuality that was not purely a function of procreation, a social expectation that a woman would be married a virgin and after nine months would have her first child, without any right to a period of life in which she could know her own sexuality, not even in marriage. Not only were we living in a time when if a woman was not married she was socially wayward, and therefore, in a certain sense, she was obliged to marry. But also it was assumed that, whoever this husband was, even if he used violence against her (even though the issue of violence had not yet been raised), she had to keep him. I have clear memories of certain dramatic cases in which, when the woman consulted a priest, the priest's

response was: 'Oh no, a wife must stay with the husband in any case, even if he hits her. If you leave your house you must remember that you may be charged with abandonment of the conjugal home.'⁴ Therefore, women having to get married regardless, and having to keep their husband no matter what kind of man he was, women never having been owners of their own sexuality, because a woman had to be married a virgin and there was no availability or ownership of birth control products which were strictly prohibited, this was the general female condition in the Italy of the time that PO was formed. As a rebellion against this condition, thanks to which woman was never the owner of her own body and of her own life choices, there emerges the Feminist Movement. And even before this there was the composite movement at the end of the 1960s, the movement of '68 with its libertarian inclination even in sexual life. At this time there matures also the great conquest that encompassed mass access to university. This allowed many women to have a completely different life condition during the period of time in which they attended university. Because they met their fellow students, they could begin to have a social life on more equal terms, incomparable to that of their mothers, who had faced the problem of how to meet a possible future husband since encounters then had been rare, very few in the life of a woman. Instead, mass access to university allowed many women the possibility of a more open relationship with fellow students of their own age and therefore the possibility of having relationships of sociality and sexuality that the preceding generation absolutely did not have. This was, therefore, a very important fact.

In any case, given the substantial power difference between men and women (of whom there were very few) that existed within the PO group, similar to that in other groups, at a certain point the relationship between female and male comrades began to fray. Increasingly there was the sense that there was a problem as far as our condition went, and we began to realize that, as militants, we were fighting for everybody, for workers, for technicians, for students, but not for ourselves because that which we were living, our condition as women, was not represented in the struggles we were engaged in. We thus realized that there was a problem that was not represented even in the vast activity of militancy that we were sustaining. Due to this I felt the need to stop for a moment, to separate myself from these struggles, to begin to analyse this condition in order to understand where the problem lay. In the spring of '71 I produced, also thanks to my encounter and confrontation with Selma James, a text that I presented as a draft in June of the same year to a group of female comrades whom I assembled for what

would be our first meeting. That text, which was revised somewhat in the months that followed, would become a small book entitled *Potere femminile e sovversione sociale* [*The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*], published in March 1972 in Venice with a vanguard publishing house, Marsilio. This book was immediately adopted by the international feminist movement as a useful tool for militancy, translated into six different languages, and as a classic feminist text, included as course reading in numerous American universities. With the draft presented at our first meeting I was bringing attention to the renowned analysis of domestic labour and its attendant implications, and my convened female comrades declared their agreement and from that point there originated our debate, our action, the desire to struggle taking our own condition as a departure point. That analysis posited that domestic labour was the primary labour of all women and therefore the issue from which, as women, we had to begin. We discussed among ourselves why as subjects we had disappeared and lacked the power to become visible, why we were the object of this abuse of power, why the struggles that we carried forward on a daily basis were invisible. They were invisible because nobody paid attention insofar as they were connected to a form of labour that was itself invisible due to the fact that it was unwaged, the labour of reproduction.

EB, MC, JP: This break with a certain kind of militancy and criticism, in favour of a radical feminism that placed the labour of reproduction at the centre of a new critique, was a critical one. How did this unfold?

MDC: This [issue of unwaged labour] was the great question to which no answer was given. Not only was no answer given, but subsequent to the great repression against all of the movements in the 1970s, this matter, in the terms in which we had raised it, became taboo in Italy together with the very feminism that had brought it up. It is telling that at the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002 (which I participated in as part of the workshop put on by the activist intellectuals from the Internet journal *The Commoner*), some of the female presenters at the Forum of the World March of Women referred to the feminism of the 1970s as a 'feminism of self-consciousness.' But what of that other feminism? That of the great struggles carried forward? Evidently that taboo still functions to this day. In the 1970s we promoted quite a wide debate on domestic labour in various countries. I myself was in the United States and in Canada many times, I had brought the debate and the consciousness of the struggles we were engaged in from the Atlantic

coast to the Pacific. We had built in 1972 a Feminist International around domestic labour, on the labour of reproduction, on all of the issues that derived from this, and in this way we had built with our female comrades from other countries the International Feminist Collective in order to promote coordinated action. In the United States as well there were Wages for Housework groups, as there were in England, in Germany, in Switzerland. Less so in France, because at that time the group *Psychanalyse et Politique* was prevalent. There were Wages for Housework groups in Canada as well, where we held many meetings to coordinate our actions. All of this work allowed for the sedimentation in the world of a great tradition of the analysis of domestic labour that was extremely well articulated, and our action and struggles made themselves heard. Yet what happened at the end of the 1970s and above all in the 1980s impressed on us yet again that history is always written by the victors. The repression also meant the erasure of our history and our struggles, and the debate on domestic labour moved ahead in terms that were themselves domesticated, the object of measurement and investigation, even of the recognition of value, so long as it was not a matter of economic value. Any expectation of economic remuneration became unspeakable. The discussion of domestic labour continued as if it had never had an origin in all that which we had written and done, and thus was deprived of its demand to represent a moment of struggle for a different world, for a different organization of production and reproduction. Our mobilization and example was always attached to the demand for a drastic lowering of working time for all, both women and men: we wanted a twenty-hour work week, precisely so that women and men could have time for reproduction and this did not remain the responsibility solely of women. We disappeared, we were banned as authors because of our own activist lives and the kind of discussion that we had promoted, and this above all at the hands of female historians and sociologists on the left. For those of us who worked at universities, all of this hostility and eagerness to erase was instrumental in facilitating the work of other women researchers of the female condition who, rather than profoundly placing in question the existing political system, proposed and continue to propose the advancement of a few within that given context. This was the case in Italy. I don't believe there was anything comparable faced by feminism in the United States, even taking into account streams that had roots in marxian studies. There, feminism, even in its activism, was not part of a history of militancy with the characteristics of the Italian situation. We had carried forward a militant feminism that not only had engaged in great struggles, but

had constituted part of a context of rebellion within which various other subjects moved during those years – workers, students, technicians, women. For this reason, within the project of the normalization of society and its discourse, this feminism was erased. There began a feminism that I refer to as ‘discourses against discourses,’ words against words that in a certain sense essentialize the positions of the other solely as a pretext for debate. To us, who were used to thinking in order to act, it all seemed extremely dull and depressing, to the point where neither those who were my closest comrades nor I participated in the ‘debates’ of the 1980s. Many of us continued to search for issues that might seem like crucial ones and within which one could envision a chance to achieve something. If one could not pick up again from here then there must be another place, not only geographic, from which to begin once more. It is no coincidence that many of us directed our attention to the Third World. Silvia Federici went to Nigeria, I myself made many trips to Africa, Indonesia, Central America. We did this on the one hand as part of a search for issues that could bring us back to the fundamental nature of certain problems, ones that were no longer up for debate in Italy, and to the urgent need for action. On the other there was the search for life, that life which was no longer possible here, so dismal and depressing was the context and so lacking in significance the very horizon of discourse around women.

EB, MC, JP: In this period your work opened up to an outside, a world with which your immediate struggles did not allow you to engage during the 1970s. This seems like a natural enough choice when faced with what in Rome you referred to as ‘state feminism.’

MDC: There was indeed a good deal of state feminism. Let us say that the effect of smothering, of the concealing of our feminism, came about also as a result of the great abundance of resources that were offered to this other feminism, large financing efforts, the structuring of academic-feminist networks of study. Through this, much attention was given to circuits of academic discourse, a discourse that was its own end, or even better, one that was intended to reproduce the university apparatus. But above all it was intended to rationalize feminist discourse. As I was just saying, the demand for the remuneration of domestic labour that was internal to a drastic reduction of the working day, all connected to a more extended and articulated system of services so that both men and women could have more free time, was no longer discussed. We had reached the point where, when some women,

within a sociological or political context, were discussing some irrelevant measure of retribution of some aspect of domestic labour, they took pains to point out and clarify that in any case this measure had nothing to do with wages for housework ...

EB, MC, JP: From this stems your increasing interest in the notion of the earth, of the relations between the earth and human body as vitally linked to social reproduction. This was what we referred to previously, when we mentioned the opening of your perspective towards an exterior – you began to look at other places in the world. Not that PO was bereft of what was here and there a global perspective, but your work began to deal with these themes in other parts of the world, particularly in developing countries.

MDC: I would like to make a few concluding remarks on what became of the labour of reproduction, and part of my considerations reconnect to your question. This work that began in the 1980s and continued through the 1990s until today collided with – both in advanced nations and in developing countries (I know the term is an unhappy one, but so is the 'Third World,' so one may as well use one or the other with the knowledge that they are purely conventions) – a great project of the underdevelopment of reproduction. Therefore the conditions of the labour of reproduction have worsened for the overwhelming majority of people in advanced countries and even more so in developing countries. This is the great problem from which to begin. Not only has there been no solution but there has been a worsening of the conditions, with two effects: on the one hand it has jeopardized the path towards autonomy for women, on the other it has intensified the workload which women dedicate to the well-being of the family or of the community of the village. This is the process that collided with the labour of reproduction and that heavily affected the life of the subjects who are primarily responsible for it – women both in advanced countries and in developing ones.

Discovering the issue of the earth as a crucial one is tied to the fact that in those years I visited the countries of the Third World many times, and therefore had a chance to directly observe how the populations in those countries reproduce themselves. Our analysis of the labour of reproduction in advanced countries had to first of all assume that this labour involved the administration of a paycheque that in Fordist society was primarily brought home by the man. Instead, under post-Fordism the woman had to administer two incomes, his and her own precarious one, because nowadays in any family both must work and

the problem is that this work is very precarious. Yet in advanced countries the labour of reproduction fundamentally passed and still passes through the administration of money, it is combined with the administration of this money that enters the house. This is a discussion we had shed some light on in the 1970s. It is not true that the male worker brings home a paycheque and consumes it by sitting down at the table (this is obviously a simplified example). The male worker comes home and there is the woman who undertakes the labour of spending this paycheque, going to the supermarket, buying goods, bringing them home, transforming them, making meals, and serving meals that the worker, she, and the children eat. This is called productive consumption, because the male worker, but not only he, must eat in order to replenish his labour power. We had shed light on the whole course of this work undertaken by women, a course that was previously invisible, but this labour nonetheless had to pass first of all through the spending of money. Subsequently, in a book on the New Deal,⁵ I would retrace these themes, analysing some cues offered by the debate engaged in by American economists around the role of women in the decades from the beginning of the twentieth century to the Great Depression. In the early 1970s, when in Italy we were analysing this problem, the woman had to spend the money brought home primarily by the man, even if shortly thereafter, between 1972 and 1979, in our country there was an increase in female employment of roughly one and a half million, an increment which already gave us a glimpse of a new profile for women and a new structure for the family. This dynamic, as I had yet to confirm, was not true of the Third World: there, at least back then it was the case, the reproduction of individuals passed centrally through agricultural labour destined for self-consumption ...

The conclusion of this discussion is that the issue of land, as soon as one leaves advanced regions, becomes immediately apparent as a crucial one regarding whether or not individuals can sustain themselves or (as often is the case) barely survive. In the 1980s when structural adjustment policies demanded by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) were applied in a drastic manner in almost all [developing] countries, strong pressure was placed on governments to privatize land that remained free, setting a price for its purchase. So no more access for agricultural use without having a deed for the property, the price of which was set so that whoever wanted to cultivate it needed to have the money to buy it. This move was particularly dramatic in its effects for many populations, as often the only ones who had enough money to purchase pieces of land were state bureaucrats, so they had an interest

in passing laws that set prices for the land and thus were on exactly the same political wavelength as IMF representatives who were prescribing these kinds of measures. I believe that many of the struggles that have broken out in Africa and that are often dismissed as ethnic struggles, ethnic warfare, are due to the extreme scarcity of land, land which is constantly diminished and is thus no longer sufficient to sustain those it had sustained before. So here the issue of land becomes dramatic inasmuch as these privatization policies involve expropriation, because those who buy the land take it away from those who were previously able to cultivate it communally. This facet is accompanied by other measures typical of structural adjustment, which often include the removal of subsidies for small-scale agriculture destined for local consumption (meanwhile the infrastructures and a great deal of the water used in the production of crops for export are financed with public money), the elimination of subsidies for the most vital foodstuffs, the privatization of various state-owned enterprises, the privatization of water, the transformation of stable jobs into precarious ones, frequent layoffs because the public sector must be streamlined, the devaluation of currency, and other measures. All of this has caused levels of poverty never witnessed before in the Third World.

So when we see these multitudes of migrants around the world, who are pointed to as examples of overpopulation, these are above all the result of the expropriation of land that has taken place from the Philippines to Africa to Latin America in order to make room for the large agribusiness plantations, for enormous dam projects, or for capitalistic projects of various types. In my estimation, then, the huge problem of hunger in the world has above all as its origin the privatization of land. This obliges one to pose to oneself the centrality of such an issue, of how it is emerging once more similar to what happened five centuries ago in Europe. The very first multitudes expelled by this mode of production were in England, where capitalism began its course by expelling free producers from their land, creating a mass of individuals with no land, with no means with which to produce and reproduce themselves, who to survive had no other option than to sell their own labour power without being able to bargain for the conditions of this sale. Marx speaks of the so-called merchants of human flesh who packaged contingents of the population in order to send them to the manufacturing districts – a practice that is very similar to what is taking place today at a planetary level, where often the destination is not even the factory.

Therefore it was a great project of expropriation of land, described by Marx in Chapters 26, 27, and 28 of *Capital* – Volume I,⁶ that sent contin-

gents of individuals to colonize the new world, America. But there would follow the expropriation of Africa, in the sense that there enormous swathes of the population were carried away from their land by violent means while on the other side of the Atlantic the Native peoples would be expropriated from the land in an equally violent manner. The latter would never have accepted capitalist work discipline, and so they were exterminated and replaced with Africans brought in chains as slaves. There was delineated in this manner the triangle of suffering constituted by Port Calabar or Port Harcourt, where the slaves departed from, the American plantations, where slaves were forced to work in order to produce cotton, and Manchester, where the factories were located for processing cotton.

Therefore the ship cycle was to take the slaves from Africa, bring them to the plantations in America, bring the product of their labour, cotton, to Manchester for the British factories, and set off again for Africa. This is the circuit of capitalist production that even today reproduces itself by proposing once again the expropriation of land, brutal labour conditions, and slavery. The expropriation of land is proceeding across the planet in an increasingly extended manner and is producing this population that appears as overpopulation but is not. So the whole debate on overpopulation is compromised at its very foundation, because it ignores the first cause of this excess, the expropriation of land. The population, just like five centuries ago, appears to be in excess because it has been deprived of its means of production and reproduction, above all the soil, and together with this it is deprived of the resources and individual and collective rights that contribute towards guaranteeing survival.

Together with the expropriation of land as it took place five centuries ago, there is reproduced labour under brutal and slave-like conditions. This phenomenon, too is growing in dimension. It is estimated that 200 million people work in these conditions, of whom roughly half are children. One only has to think of the making of carpets, or the production of saris, or of the plantations and mines in Brazil.

With respect to the different role that the land has in human reproduction in contexts as different from ours as the African one, I would like to go back to what I was able to ascertain during my stay in Nigeria. The figure we would refer to as the student worker, in Calabar, that old slave port, was a student who cultivated the land between university buildings where cows also grazed. This is a very different version of a student worker; one who, to support himself, does not necessarily go off to engage in waged labour, but who instead cultivates a bit of land

that the university gives him the possibility to utilize, which helps him maintain himself. I say this to point out how much difference there is in the world as far as modalities of reproduction go.

So if it is true that the land is crucial for the subsistence of populations it is equally important that we ask ourselves what has become of these populations once they have been expelled from their land. As I have stated in various pieces I have written, they are mainly destined to die, which is a different way to solve overpopulation than those officially espoused. Death by starvation, death due to economic difficulties, death due to the constant wars that also take away land by rendering it unusable, death due to military and police repression, death due to the conditions in which the expelled live in refugee camps, or death due to the spread of illnesses brought on by the collapse of sanitary-hygiene systems. Only a small portion of the survivors will be able to find underpaid labour in the advanced world.

So if I reflect on the labour of reproduction and on the world today, I either consider such an enormous issue, that of the function that the expropriation of land has, and therefore I question myself as to where I should begin so that populations rather than being destined for extermination have at least the possibility to nourish themselves, to first survive and then to live, I either pose this question to myself or all of the other ones seem secondary.

The issue of the land is not only one of expropriation, however, and it is not only one of expropriation within the countries that make up the Third World. In the recent counter-summit set up in opposition to the one put on by FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) in June of 2002 in Rome, there were smaller farmers from the United States, something I refer to in my essay 'The Native in Us, the Land We Belong To.'⁸

In fact, this agricultural politics based on large-scale expropriations and on the technologies from the Green Revolution provokes an ongoing crisis not only in the Third World, but also in the First, and for that reason, as I was saying, American farmers were there with farmers from the Third World at the counter-summit. But the rediscovery of land as the fundamental element, the only element from which we can derive the possibility of sustenance and life, and I would add also of inspiration and the senses, which is not a secondary aspect, emerged in the new modalities of organization and the construction of networks that individuals thrown out on the street by the unpredictable swerves of the global economy have come up with not only to survive but also in order to guarantee for themselves a certain quality of life. I have heard that in the recent movements that have arisen in the crisis in Argentina,

groups of unemployed people have occupied land in order to guarantee for themselves the possibility of sustenance and have introduced new modalities of exchange such as bartering, without the intermediary of money. They also have instituted modalities of alternative production and the possibility of minting and using alternative money. This reality, which took many activists by surprise, did not surprise me, because for some time now I had been paying attention to this phenomenon. As I discussed in the book on the New Deal, the United States has a long tradition in this respect. The Seattle League and the Unemployed Citizens' League as far back as the 1930s had constructed large networks of alternative production, as well as bartering, and they used as currency their own money vouchers. And in recent decades, the Lets (or 'green dollars'), valid for spending within a system of the supply of services connected to it, has been the most famous form of alternative money. Another example is the Ithaca Hours, which mints an alternative currency that is valid locally and can circulate. And there are other forms. This practice of minting alternative money, as I was saying, is part of an old American tradition. Yet it is one that is particularly relevant in the context of the construction of ever-larger alternative networks that are also related to land and labour.

This means that people in the most diverse contexts across the planet are rebelling against the death sentence imposed on them because the global economy has decided there is no space for them, and they are determined not only to find a way to continue to sustain themselves, but also to avoid a degraded standard of food. If at one time in the United States social assistance was conceived of as having coupons so as to be able to go to the supermarket and access processed food that is not fresh, people have now decided to leave this conception behind and are demanding fresh and healthy food. I think this is a great shift; it means that the question of the land is important not only with respect to the process of expropriation with the consequence of then having to accept whatever product of the Green Revolution, but also in terms of the devastation of the land's reproductive powers wrought by these agricultural techniques. There is a rebellion in progress on this terrain – carried forward by ever increasing swathes of the population in developed countries as well as developing ones – that is representative of people's increasing determination to guarantee for themselves health as well as survival.

EB, MC, JP: You speak of the devastation of the earth's reproductive powers, which seems like a good transition point for us to ask you to

speak of the body, of your most recent focus on the medical establishment. Perhaps you could begin by giving us your thoughts on the present state of discourse surrounding the body as an entry point for your own activism surrounding the practice of hysterectomy.

MDC: ... I would never have been able to discover the tremendous abuse that is inflicted on the female body, that is, hysterectomy – something I will return to later – if I had not had a very strong sense of identity that I built for myself along my feminist path, if I had not had the exceptionally strong sense that I had to defend my body as organism and as an intact body, and if I had not had in mind the importance and the richness of the abundance of resources that an integral body presents ... Yet the abuse of this operation⁸ is not only a contemporary issue. It has obviously gone on for some time, because I have memories even from when I was very young of many women being subjected to it, although then it was almost impossible to find a figure for the number of operations that were carried out. Since the reform of the Italian health system at the beginning of the 1990s it has at least been possible to access such data ... In 1994, in Italy, 38,000 hysterectomies were recorded, in 1997 that figure grew to 68,000, and in 1998 and 1999 the numbers fell just short of 70,000 recorded operations a year; this meant that at a national level, for one woman out of every five there was the likelihood of having to undergo this operation, while in some regions, such as the Veneto, it was one out of four women. This was the mass castration of women. It was exactly a case of mass castration and disablement, because one must remember that this operation as a rule, in half of all cases, is accompanied by ovariectomy, the removal of the ovaries even if these are healthy. Preventative ovariectomy, as they refer to it. It is the only case in medicine in which a healthy organ is removed as a preventative measure ...

I have also concluded that regarding this operation some horrendous abuses of disabled people have taken place. One woman wrote to me from Australia, giving me all of the details in her case and permission to speak of it, and asking me whom she could contact in order to publicize what had happened to herself and also to others, so as to do something about it, so that it will not happen to others. When she had not yet menstruated and was still a child with mobility problems – she was in a wheelchair as she could not move her legs – yet with a perfectly capable mind, doctors subjected her to a hysterectomy so that she would not be faced with the problem of menstruation while in the wheelchair ...

Another abuse which I wrote about in the Rome article [La Porta dell'Orto...], even though there I did not have enough time to discuss it,

is that now for breast cancer a preventative measure has been developed that is inconceivable to me. For women who are the bearers of the BRCA1 or BRCA2 chromosome, which it has been suggested indicates a high risk for developing breast and/or ovarian cancer, one measure consists of removing both breasts and ovaries in order to protect them from this risk. This is referred to as preventative surgery. However, as doctors themselves say, it is not certain that the woman who undergoes the operation would have gotten breast or ovarian cancer, and it is not certain that even after such mutilation she will not get cancer in such locations ... This seems to me to be genetic terrorism.

EB, MC, JP: We want to end by asking you to discuss your role as a female professor and the pedagogical strategies you employ in that space.

MDC: I believe I have basically maintained great continuity with the 1970s in terms of my teaching methods. This is because I always try to start the discussion by getting students to begin with a problem. All you need to do is turn on the television: misery is being multiplied, starvation is being extended, deaths are being constantly multiplied. Why is this? We are in the mode of production that is considered the most productive of all, which ought to have guaranteed more resources compared with other ways of organizing, and yet this is simply not the case, all it produces is more misery, more death, more hunger. Why does it not produce a more generalized well-being? This is the point from which I generally begin in my teaching. This I follow up with some explanations as to the fundamental laws of capitalist development, that typically this mode of production produces accumulations of wealth in the form of capital on one side and the expansion of misery on the other: the concentration of wealth and the extension of hunger. My students read chapters 27, 28, and 33 of *Capital*, Volume I, quite closely. Thus we cover expropriation of the land and the theory of systemic colonization, because there they can find the roots of the phenomena, the results of which appear as soon as they turn on the television but the true origins of which are always kept hidden. When I was able to teach longer courses, in the years previous to the reform of the universities, I also had my students study the chapter on the working day in the same volume very closely. Currently, the course offerings have been halved and I have to work around this. What I cover are the Marxist tools of analysis that I think cannot be set aside, as well as writings, texts, and videos by researchers of capitalist development, of international debt, of globalization and its new subjects, of the issues of the land and of

women. Here obviously I employ the older and more current works that belong to our tradition and the ways in which these have been fruitfully crossed with eco-feminism. I offer the students a choice between the numerous texts produced by the protagonists of current movements against neoliberal globalization and against war, therefore, those by Vandana Shiva, José Bové, Marcos, Rigoberta Menchù, and others, so that they can capture the manner in which reality is in movement. Thus there is starvation, but it is not a starvation that remains immobile, it is a hunger that contains people who on the one hand struggle, rebel, and on the other propose an alternative view, who have other demands and who propose alternative solutions. It is not true that there aren't solutions ... at the same time I try to bring the students to the understanding of paths by which another knowledge can be constructed ... I also maintain something that might sound somewhat heretical for those who are committed to the view that globalization is an ineluctable fact – that there is a need, in many respects but beginning with the agricultural and nutritional one, to relocalize development and ruralize the world again. This means that if I want to have genuine food it has to be produced nearby, it has to be produced at a local level for it to be fresh. This implies that every country must have its own diversified agricultural production. In the agricultural and nutritional sphere this means that encouraging specialization by geographic areas within the neoliberal internationalization of markets and the industrial production of food is a strategy that ought to be refused.

The aspiration of populations, that of having a local and diversified agriculture that offers them fresh and genuine food which does not arrive on an airplane after having been polluted in order to be preserved, is a fundamental demand. Therefore, these issues, the expropriation of the land, local cultivation, the local diversification of crops, avoiding a situation in which one country produces *x* crop exclusively and another, *y* crop ... they are in all of our interests even in developed countries, not only in the Third World. These are issues on which can be built a political recomposition, because our freedom and our quality of life depend on it. In Rome I said that even if we took for granted that one day there would be a guaranteed social wage for all, what would we do with it if we could only buy poison and with it our own extinction? Therefore it is time that the debates around the money-form and technology were united, in a very strong and important manner, with those of the land and of agriculture. I consider them to be the primary issues facing us today.

NOTES

The following interview was carried out on a splendid day in June of 2002 amidst the blooming oleanders on the terrace of Mariarosa Dalla Costa's house in Padova, Italy. While the entire interview was filmed as an intended resource for women's centres across North American universities, Mariarosa kindly allowed us to publish a shorter version for this collection.

- 1 Dalla Costa is referring to a talk given at the *Operaismo a Convegno* conference organized in Rome in June of 2002. For a report on the conference, see Enda Brophy, 'Italian *Operaismo* Face to Face,' in *Historical Materialism* 12.1 no. 1. For a partial translation of Dalla Costa's talk, see Arianna Bove's translation at: <http://www.generation-online.org/p/pdallacosta.htm>. This talk with the title 'La porta dell'orto e del giardino,' has been partially published in Italian in G. Borio, F. Pozzi, and G. Roggero (eds.), *Gli operaisti* (Roma: Derive Approdi, 2005) and in its entirety as 'La puerta del huerto y del jardin' in *Noesis* 15, no. 28 (julio-diciembre 2005): 79-100 (<http://www.uacj.mx>).
- 2 Trans. note: Porto Marghera was a site of petrochemical production during the 1960s, where workerist militants such as the Veneto-Emiliano section of *Potere Operaio* engaged in struggles. See Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).
- 3 *Lotta Continua*, or 'Unceasing Struggle,' was another strong tendency within the Italian extraparlamentarian left of the 1960s and 1970s.
- 4 Trans. note: In Italy at the time the abandonment of the conjugal home or 'abbandono del tetto coniugale' was a punishable by law.
- 5 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Famiglia Welfare e Stato tra Progressismo e New Deal*, 3rd ed. (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1997).
- 6 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1 (New York: Vintage, 1977).
- 7 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, 'The Native in Us, the Land We Belong To,' in *Common Sense* 23 (1998); and in *The Commoner* 6 (2002), at <http://www.thecommoner.org>.
- 8 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, ed., *Isterectomia. Il problema sociale di un abuso contro le donne* (Hysterectomy: The Social Problem of an Abuse against Women) (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2002), forthcoming from New York: Autonomedia.