

The Commoner

a web journal for other values

ISSUE 15

"CARE WORK" AND THE COMMONS



WINTER 2012
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In the beginning there is the doing, the social flow of human interaction and creativity, and the doing is imprisoned by the deed, and the deed wants to dominate the doing and life, and the doing is turned into work, and people into things. Thus the world is crazy, and revolts are also practices of hope.

This journal is about living in a world in which the doing is separated from the deed, in which this separation is extended in an increasing numbers of spheres of life, in which the revolt about this separation is ubiquitous.

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Issue 15

Winter 2012

Credits

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Acknowledgements & Credits

We would like to thank:

Laura Agustín for her essay “Sex as Work and Sex Work.” Laura Maria Agustín is an internationally known sociologist and anthropologist who studies undocumented migration, informal labor markets, and the sex industry. She is the author of many essays and books on sex work and migration, including *Sex at the Margins : Migration, Labour Markets, and the Rescue Industry* (Zed Books 2007).

Kolya Abramsky for his essay “Energy and Social Reproduction.” Abramsky is a long-time activist in the anti-globalization/alternative energy movement and the author of *Sparking a Worldwide Energy Revolution: Social Struggles in the Transition to a Post-Petroleum World*, AK Press, 2010.

Nicholas Beuret for the essay "Starting from the social wage". After being part of the failure to close all refugee detention centres in Australia, 6 years ago Nicholas moved to London. He is a long-term activist, who is currently involved in labour struggles and social movements against austerity in the UK. He has a young daughter and is a regular contributor to *The Paper* (wearethepaper.org).

Liliana Caballero Velasquez, of the Association *Madres Comunitarias* in Bogota (Colombia) for the interview she has given us.

Mariarosa Dalla Costa for the essays she has made available to us and allowing us to use her "Women and the Subversion of the Community," originally published in Italian in 1971, later published in England, in M. Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1975). Dalla Costa, "Reproduction and Emigration" – an outstanding contribution to theory and politics of social reproduction – is published here for the first time in English. It was originally published in A. Serafini ed., *L'operaio multinazionale in Europa* (1974). Dalla Costa's "A General Strike" was originally published in E. B. Freedman ed., *The Essential Feminist Reader*. (2007). Internationally known for her path-breaking contributions to feminist theory and long time contributor to *The Commoner*, Dalla Costa is a professor of Political Science at the University of Padova (Italy). Her latest works include *Our Mother Ocean* (co-authored) (Forthcoming, PM Press, Fall 2012).

Matthijs deBruijne for making available to us two of the pictures that we have used for our cover: On the top, left side: The (Dutch) Cleaners' Union Parliament (2011), originally published in the journal *De Volkskrant*.

On the top at the center is a painting with small notes about the labour conditions of the Domestic Workers in the Netherlands. deBruijne is an Dutch artist who has worked with several workers' organization, including domestic workers' and has collaborated in the production of videos on immigrant domestic workers in the Netherlands and in the production of the painting at the center of our cover.

Viviane Gonik for her essay "Is Work Soluble in Love." A long time feminist activist based in Geneva, Gonik has worked at the Institute of Occupational Health Sciences in Lausanne, and contributed to studies on work related mental health problems. She is co-author of *Hommes-Femmes: metamorphoses d'un rapport social*. Geneve, Georg, 1998.

Priscilla Gonzalez for the interview she has given us and the information concerning the campaign by DWU. Priscilla Gonzalez is the Director of the New York Domestic Workers United. As she stated in a Testimony before the New York State Assembly Committee on Labor on November 21, 2008, she is "the proud daughter of one of the 200,000 workers who make all other work possible in New York" and a fulltime organizer with Domestic Workers United since 2003.

RJ Maccani works, as described in his blog, as the Community Programs Producer for The Foundry Theatre in NY. He organizes with Regeneración Childcare NYC and the Challenging Male Supremacy Project. He is also on the Board of Directors of the Brecht Forum and a member of Another Politics is Possible. He is training as an herbalist at Third Root Community Health Center and as a generative somatics practitioner.

Victoria Mamani of the La Paz based feminist organization *Mujeres Creando*. Victoria Mamani has been a protagonist of the struggle of domestic workers that led to the passing of a legislation in 2003 specifying these workers' rights and entitlements.

Pascale Molinier for her essay: "Of Feminists and their Cleaning Ladies: caught between the reciprocity of care and the desire for depersonalization." The essay was originally published in *Multitudes* 2009/3-4, no. 37-38, p. 113-121. Pascale Molinier is a French psychologist whose field of research is the psychodynamic of work.

Ariel Salleh for her essay: "Fukushima: A Call For Women's Leadership." An internationally known Australian feminist writer and activist, Salleh is one the leading theorists in the social ecology and eco-feminist movements. Transdisciplinary in her approach, she has written extensively on the question of reproductive labor from a perspective she defines as 'embodied materialism.' She is the co-editor of the international ecology journal *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*, and author of many essays on the relations between Marxism and Feminism, eco-socialism, deep ecology. Her best know work is *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*. (Zed Books, 1997).

Konstanze Schmitt for the pictures of the street performance by the domestic workers of *Territorio Domestico* which we have included in the cover. On the background of one of the pictures is the "Triumph of the Domestic Workers," a painted canvass on bicycle wheels with gearwheels on its front, that Schmitt and *Territorio Domestico* created on the model of the "Triumph of the name of Jesus," a

colonial painting by Juan Ramos from 1703. As Schmitt writes:

One of the slogans of *Territorio Domestico* is: Without us, the world doesn't revolve.... In order to visualize this principle and domestic work in the society, the group *Territorio Domestico* has developed its own symbol: a system of gearwheels set in motion by a female domestic worker.... These gearwheels who are very present in the painting, are the link between the colonial painting/situation and the actual system of colonialism, and it focuses on the power of the persons under the wheels – answering the question of “Who moves the wagon/world?”

We also thank Konstanze Schmitt for the interviews with Rafaela, Marlene and Mary. Konstanze Schmitt is a Berlin based artist.

The Socialist Feminist Collective (Turkey). Based in Istanbul, the Collective is campaigning in several Turkish cities calling on women to stop their domestic work until they are paid for the work they do and men begin to share the work. <http://www.sosyalistfeministkolektif.org/>

Todos Somos Japon for allowing us to use “Nuclear Housework and The Enraged Mothers and Farmers of Japan.” Todos Somos Japon is a New York based group originally formed to publicize the consequences of the Fukushima disasters. It aims to create a network of activists in and out of Japan organizing not only around nuclear issues but against the capitalist politics of permanent crisis and displacement. Its website is: jfissures.org

Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas of the La Paz based, feminist Bolivian feminist organization, **Mujeres Creando**. Ana Rosario Adrian Vargas is one of the main organizers of the of the daycare center that Mujeres Creando has set up since 2007.

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Preface: Care Work and the Commons

Massimo De Angelis

It is becoming increasingly clear that the current economic, social and environmental crises are degrading the conditions of everyday life for a vast range of people in many parts of the world, and are even posing apocalyptic threats to our social and ecological reproduction. It is also clear that the global elites' answers to these crises cannot provide any solutions to these problems. Indeed, short of a dramatic paradigmatic change in their strategic horizons, we find no hope on this front. It is not just that governments continue to cut social spending and entitlements to bail out the banks. As the struggles against the policies employed to deal with the crisis of neoliberalism intensify, we witness the rise of a post-modern form of fascism. The brutal attacks by militarized riot police against the occupy movements of the US and Europe, the endless butchering of civilians whose bodies now pile up in morgues throughout the Middle East, are all different modulations of this trend. Yet, new social movements are mushrooming everywhere with renewed creativity in their organisational forms. Even the moderate media, despite

its cynicism towards the constituent powers expressed by these movements, is beginning to acknowledge the rationality of these popular revolts, now circulating from New York to Athens, from Cairo to Madrid, often drawing parallels between diverse instances, highlighting unfamiliar alliances (such as that between army veterans, workers and students), and beginning to acknowledge “the outrage of the mainstream.”

In this context, there is an urgent need to construct non-capitalistic ways to reproduce our life, other than those provided by states and markets. From the beginning of the history of this journal, we have referred to these alternative as “the commons.” We were not alone in this endeavour. Many today think of the commons as the seeds of a radically new social system in which reproduction stems from the direct participation of communities of producers reclaiming, sharing, and pooling resources of various types, driven by values fundamentally opposed to those embedded in the capital circuits: solidarity, mutual aid, cooperation, respect for human being and the environment, horizontalism and direct democracy. But what has distinguished this journal is the recognition that the commons must exist today in a world in which the social and ecological metabolism is dominated by capital’s priorities and *the threat* they pose to social reproduction. Thus the commons – their development, their networking, their survival – must be conceived within fields of power relations, and viewed not only as sites of alternative ways of reproducing life, but as sites of struggle, as well as potential targets of cooptation and enclosure.

This implies two things. First, the present global crisis urges us to engage in the constitution of alternatives to

life under capitalism, and the construction of more autonomous forms of social reproduction. As neither the state nor the market can guarantee our survival, we need to embark in a journey of transformation built on the power of the commons. For this, however, we need to go beyond the logic of "survival" – ours and that of the ecosystem – as the social relations that we construct to reproduce ourselves are the true source of our power vis-à-vis capital. Ultimately this journey implies a “commoning” transforming our subjectivities.

Second, as the commons develop within a field of power relations, the character and social space of their autonomy are necessarily negotiated with capital. But negotiation can only occur on the basis of the commons’ constituted power, which is the power of reproducing with dignity and freedom the life and bodies of all involved in a process of reproduction. Here is the crucial importance of this issue of *The Commoner*, edited by Camille Barbagallo and Silvia Federici. The analyses and stories it weaves together force us to look at the power of the commons power from the perspective of the labour required to reproduce human beings as well as labour power: child-care, housework, sex work and elder care, both in the form of waged and unwaged labour. Its objective is not only “to examine how the neo-liberal restructuring of the global economy, over the last three decades, has reshaped the organization of this work” transforming “our bodies and desires” and re-configuring “our homes, our families and social relations.” Most importantly, this issue wants to highlight the struggles that domestic-care workers (mostly women, but also men) are making in response to the new conditions of reproductive labour. For these struggles pose the need for

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and invent new forms of commoning, building bridges between and beyond roles, such as employees and employers, clients and service providers, parents and nannies. These forms of commoning are vital for us, not only in order to overcome the crisis of reproduction we face, and refuse to have those most socially vulnerable – women, children, the elders, immigrant workers – pay the price for it, but also to begin to mold a new society and reconstitute the common/s. For the articles in this issue demonstrate that the power of the common/s begins with the social powers we deploy to *materially* reproduce and *affectively* care for ourselves.