



RE-ENCHANTING THE WORLD

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*Feminism and the
Politics of the Commons*

Silvia Federici
Foreword by Peter Linebaugh

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The University: A Knowledge Common?

When, in April 2011, I was invited to give a talk at the University of Minnesota at a conference entitled “Beneath the University, the Commons” I wondered what that title could mean. At the conference itself there were different interpretations. Jason Read reminded us that the university is already potentially a common, as students go there leaving the individualizing environment of their families to join a community and engage in collective activities. George Caffentzis spoke of knowledge commons, ranging from physical spaces like libraries to philosophical principles, such as the long-standing ban, dating back to Plato, against the commodification of knowledge.

For me the title of the conference brought a flood of images not the least of which was literally that of the grass and the land under the cement on which classrooms and libraries have been built, suggesting that building a university may be a sort of enclosure. My response was partly motivated by my memories of the universities of Port Harcourt, where I taught from 1984 to the end of 1986, and the nearby University of Calabar, which I frequently visited during my stays at Port Harcourt.

Three images in particular stood out. Uniport had been recently built with money coming from the oil boom of the late 1970s. It was built on land expropriated from the nearby village of Alu, but the villagers still held on to it. Every morning bicycling to my classes I saw women farming along the road on any patch of land the university had not cemented. In January, the time of slash and burn, the smoke coming from the burning stubs filled the campus, but no one, to my knowledge, ever protested. Possibly the students who trekked to their classrooms looked at these women bent on

their machetes as people without knowledge, ignorant, with nothing to contribute to their education. Yet I soon learned that these same women knew better than me and better than many students all that was taking place on the campus, and they reported it to that great female common that in Africa is the market. When, for instance, a student was murdered in the spring of 1986, the market women asked me what I thought, and when they heard what I learned from my colleagues they shook their head with contempt.

Another image I still recall from the University of Port Harcourt is going to the bush in the evening to watch the sun setting among the palms. As I pedaled I would see the cars of some colleagues passing along, and I soon realized that they were going to check the progress of the food crops they had planted on the university's land. They did not own the land and did not cultivate it themselves, but they could not imagine not taking advantage of the availability of good land and being completely dependent on a wage. Again, everybody knew and no one complained.

Then, there were the cows. Every spring at the neighboring University of Calabar, the cows arrived. They came from the north to graze, driven by cattle raisers who brought them south in order to sell them, but before doing so they wanted to fatten them up with the rich grass of the rain forest belt. And the university accommodated itself to this need and hosted the cows.

These images of commons refusing to vanish, even in a university built on an expropriated village with money from the short-lived oil boom, receded, however, when I began investigating what might be underneath the university that hosted the conference. What I was told was that the land trust university that hosted the conference was constructed near the site of what once had been a market place belonging to the Sioux populations that had inhabited the area and that homesteaders had displaced, to then suffocate their rebellion in a bloodbath, including the execution of thirty-eight of their leaders on December 26, 1862—selected by President Lincoln a few days before his Emancipation Declaration from a list of more than three hundred originally presented for his approval.

I have not been able to verify if what I was told concerning the site of the St. Paul campus is true. But the story made me realize how easy it is to go through a university and work on a campus without knowing anything of its history or of the material infrastructure on which it depends and the people who work in it.

My contribution to the conference was to stress that if we want to change the university and construct a ‘knowledge commons’ we need to be concerned not only with the content of the curricula and, most important, the cost of studying, as crucial as these undoubtedly are. We need to question the material conditions of the production of a university, its history, and its relation to the surrounding communities. Especially in the U.S., where so much of the land used by institutions was appropriated following the bloody dispossession of its former inhabitants, such a reckoning is essential.

We must also change our conception of what knowledge is and who can be considered a knowledge producer. Currently, knowledge production on the campuses is insulated from the broad infrastructural work that sustains academic life, which requires a multiplicity of subjects (cleaners, cafeteria workers, groundkeepers, etc.) making it possible for students and teachers to return to the classroom every day. Yet, like women’s reproductive work, this work too is mostly invisible. Every day “those who work by the hands” (Brecht) make it possible for “those who work with the head” and for the megamachine to start off again, but at best they are only recognized when they refuse to work. It is also assumed that they cannot be producers of knowledge, although increasingly the staff of U.S. campuses is made of immigrant workers or asylum seekers bringing to their work a rich international and political experience. This was the case of many workers at Hofstra University, where I have taught, which is located in the midst of the second largest Salvadoran community in the United States: so politically important that when, after the end of the war, the FMLN—now the party in power—had to take strategic decisions they would come to consult with them. To make a university a common we need to overcome the hierarchies existing within it on the basis of its division of labor. This is especially important today, as many of these university workers face deportation.

Feminism and the Politics of the Commons in an Era of Primitive Accumulation

Our perspective is that of the planet's commoners: human beings with bodies, needs, desires, whose most essential tradition is of cooperation in the making and maintenance of life; and yet have had to do so under conditions of suffering and separation from one another, from nature and from the common wealth we have created through generations.

—Emergency Exit Collective, “The Great Eight Masters and the Six Billion Commoners,” Bristol, May Day 2008

The way in which women's subsistence work and the contribution of the commons to the concrete survival of local people are both made invisible through the idealizing of them are not only similar but have common roots. . . . In a way, women are treated like commons and commons are treated like women.

—Marie Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen,
The Subsistence Perspective

Reproduction precedes social production. Touch the women, touch the rock.

—Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto*

Introduction: Why Commons?

At least since the Zapatistas took over the Zócalo in San Cristóbal de las Casas on December 31, 1993, to protest legislation dissolving the *ejidal* lands of Mexico, the concept of ‘the commons’ has been gaining popularity

among the radical left internationally and in the U.S., appearing as a basis for convergence among anarchists, Marxists, socialists, ecologists, and ecofeminists.¹

There are important reasons why this apparently archaic idea has come to the center of political discussion in contemporary social movements. Two in particular stand out. On one hand, there is the demise of the statist model of revolution that for decades had sapped the efforts of radical movements to build an alternative to capitalism. On the other, the neoliberal attempt to subordinate every form of life and knowledge to the logic of the market has heightened our awareness of the danger of living in a world where we no longer have access to seas, trees, animals, and our fellow beings except through the cash nexus. The 'new enclosures' have also made visible a world of communal properties and relations that many had believed to be extinct or had not valued until threatened with privatization.² Ironically, the new enclosures have demonstrated not only that the common has not vanished but also that new forms of social cooperation are constantly being produced, including in areas of life where none previously existed, for example, the internet.

In this context, the idea of the common/s has offered a logical and historical alternative to both the state and private property and the state and the market, enabling us to reject the fiction that they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of our political possibilities. It has also served an ideological function as a unifying concept prefiguring the cooperative society that the radical left is striving to create. Nevertheless, ambiguities and significant differences remain in the interpretations of this concept that we need to clarify if we want the principle of the commons to translate into a coherent political project.³

What, for example, constitutes a common? We have land, water, and air commons and digital commons; our acquired entitlements (e.g., social security pensions) are often described as commons, and so are languages, libraries, and collective products of past cultures. But are all these commons equivalent from the viewpoint of their political potential? Are they all compatible? And how can we ensure that they do not project a unity that remains to be constructed? Finally, should we speak of 'commons' in the plural or 'the common,' as autonomist Marxists propose we do, this concept designating in their view the social relations characteristic of the dominant form of production in the post-Fordist era?

With these questions in mind, in this essay I look at the politics of the commons from a feminist perspective, where ‘feminist’ refers to a standpoint shaped by the struggle against sexual discrimination and over reproductive work, which, to paraphrase Linebaugh’s comment above, is the rock upon which society is built and by which every model of social organization must be tested. This intervention is necessary, in my view, to better define this politics and clarify the conditions under which the principle of the common/s can become the foundation of an anticapitalist program. Two concerns make these tasks especially important.

Global Commons, World Bank Commons

First, since at least the early 1990s, the language of the commons has been appropriated by the World Bank and the United Nations and put at the service of privatization. Under the guise of protecting biodiversity and conserving the global commons, the bank has turned rain forests into ecological reserves and expelled the populations that for centuries had drawn their sustenance from them, while ensuring access to those who can pay, for instance, through ecotourism.⁴ For its part, the United Nations has revised the international law governing access to the oceans in ways that enable governments to concentrate the use of seawaters in fewer hands, again in the name of preserving the common heritage of mankind.⁵

The World Bank and the UN are not alone in their adaptation of the idea of the commons to market interests. Responding to different motivations, a revalorization of the commons has become trendy among mainstream economists and capitalist planners; witness the growing academic literature on the subject and its cognates: social capital, gift economies, altruism. Witness also the official recognition of this trend through the conferral of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009 to the leading voice in this field, the political scientist Elinor Ostrom.⁶

Development planners and policymakers have discovered that under proper conditions a collective management of natural resources can be more efficient and less prone to conflict than privatization and that commons can be made to produce very well for the market.⁷ They have also recognized that carried to the extreme the commodification of social relations has self-defeating consequences. The extension of the commodity form to every corner of the social factory promoted by neoliberalism is an ideal limit for capitalist ideologues, but it is a project not only unrealizable but undesirable from the viewpoint of long-term reproduction of

the capitalist system. Capitalist accumulation is structurally dependent on the free appropriation of immense quantities of labor and resources that must appear as externalities to the market, like the unpaid domestic work that women have provided, upon which employers have relied for the reproduction of the workforce.

It is no accident, then, that long before the Wall Street meltdown, a variety of economists and social theorists warned that the marketization of all spheres of life is detrimental to the market's smooth functioning, for markets too, the argument goes, depend on the existence of nonmonetary relations like confidence, trust, and gift giving.⁸ In brief, capital is learning about the virtues of the common good.

We must be very careful, then, not to craft the discourse on the commons in such a way as to allow a crisis-ridden capitalist class to revive itself, posturing, for instance, as the environmental guardian of the planet.

What Commons?

A second concern is that, while international institutions have learned to make commons functional for the market, how commons can become the foundation of a noncapitalist economy is a question still unanswered. From Peter Linebaugh's work, especially *The Magna Carta Manifesto* (2008), we have learned that commons have been the thread that has connected the history of the class struggle into our time, and indeed the fight for the commons is all around us. Mainers are fighting to preserve access to their fisheries against the attack of corporate fleets; residents of Appalachia are organizing to save their mountains threatened by strip mining; open source and free software movements are opposing the commodification of knowledge and opening new spaces for communications and cooperation. We also have the many invisible commoning activities and communities that people are creating in North America, which Chris Carlsson has described in his *Nowtopia* (2007). As Carlsson shows, much creativity is invested in the production of 'virtual commons' and forms of sociality that thrive under the radar of the money/market economy.

Most important has been the creation of urban gardens, which spread across the country in the 1980s and 1990s, thanks mostly to the initiatives of immigrant communities from Africa, the Caribbean, or the South of the United States. Their significance cannot be overestimated. Urban gardens have opened the way to a 'rurbanization' process that is indispensable if we are to regain control over our food production, regenerate our

environment, and provide for our subsistence. The gardens are far more than a source of food security: they are centers of sociality, knowledge production, and cultural and intergenerational exchange. As Margarita Fernandez writes of urban gardens in New York, they as places where people come together not just to work the land but to play cards, hold weddings, and have baby showers or birthday parties, they “strengthen community cohesion.”⁹ Some have partner relationships with local schools, providing children with environmental education after school. Not least, gardens are “a medium for the transport and encounter of diverse cultural practices,” so that African vegetables and farming practices, for example, mix with those of the Caribbean.¹⁰

Still, the most significant feature of urban gardens is that they produce for neighborhood consumption, rather than for commercial purposes. This distinguishes them from other reproductive commons that either produce for the market, like the fisheries of Maine’s ‘Lobster Coast,’¹¹ or are bought on the market, like the land trusts that preserve open spaces. The problem, however, is that urban gardens have remained a spontaneous grassroots initiative and there have been few attempts by movements in the U.S. to expand their presence and to make access to land a key terrain of struggle. More generally, the left has not posed the question of how to bring together the many proliferating commons that are being defended, developed, and fought for, so that they can form a cohesive whole and provide a foundation for a new mode of production.

An exception is the theory proposed by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009), which argues that a society built on the principle of ‘the common’ is already evolving from the informatization and ‘cognitization’ of production. According to this theory, as production presumably becomes production of knowledge, culture, and subjectivity organized through the internet, a common space and common wealth are created that escape the problem of defining rules of inclusion or exclusion. For access and use multiply the resources available on the net, rather than subtracting from them, thus signifying the possibility of a society built on abundance—the only remaining hurdle confronting the ‘multitude’ being how to prevent the capitalist ‘capture’ of the wealth produced.

The appeal of this theory is that it does not separate the formation of ‘the common’ from the organization of work and production but sees it immanent to it. Its limit is that its picture of the common absolutizes the

work of a minority possessing skills not available to most of the world population. It also ignores that this work produces commodities for the market, and it overlooks the fact that online communication and production depends on economic activities—mining and microchip and rare-earth production—that, as currently organized, are extremely destructive, socially and ecologically.¹² Moreover, with its emphasis on knowledge and information, this theory skirts the question of the reproduction of everyday life. This, however, is true of the discourse on the commons as a whole, which is mostly concerned with the formal preconditions for the existence of commons and less with the material requirements for the construction of a commons-based economy enabling us to resist dependence on wage labor and subordination to capitalist relations.

Women and the Commons

In this context a feminist perspective on the commons is important. It begins with the realization that, as the primary subjects of reproductive work, historically and in our time, women have depended on access to communal natural resources more than men and have been most penalized by their privatization and most committed to their defense. As I wrote in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), in the first phase of capitalist development, women were at the forefront of the struggle against land enclosures both in England and in the ‘New World,’ and they were the staunchest defenders of the communal cultures that European colonization attempted to destroy. In Peru, when the Spanish conquistadores took control of their villages, women fled to the high mountains where they recreated forms of collective life that have survived to this day. Not surprisingly, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the most violent attack on women in the history of the world: the persecution of women as witches. Today, in the face of a new process of primitive accumulation, women are the main social force standing in the way of a complete commercialization of nature, supporting a noncapitalist use of land and a subsistence-oriented agriculture. Women are the subsistence farmers of the world. In Africa, they produce 80 percent of the food people consume, despite the attempts made by the World Bank and other agencies to convince them to divert their activities to cash cropping. In the 1990s, in many African towns, in the face of rising food prices, they have appropriated plots in public lands and planted corn, beans, and cassava “along roadsides . . . in parks, along rail-lines” changing the urban landscape of African cities and breaking

down the separation between town and country in the process.¹³ In India, the Philippines, and across Latin America, women have replanted trees in degraded forests, joined hands to chase away loggers, made blockades against mining operations and the construction of dams, and led the revolt against the privatization of water.¹⁴

The other side of women's struggle for direct access to means of reproduction has been the formation across the Third World, from Cambodia to Senegal, of credit associations that function as money commons.¹⁵ Under different names, the *tontines* (as they are called in parts of Africa) are autonomous, self-managed, women-made banking systems that provide cash to individuals or groups that have no access to banks, working purely on a basis of trust. In this, they are completely different from the micro-credit systems promoted by the World Bank, which function on a basis of mutual policing and shame, reaching the extreme (e.g., in Niger) of posting in public places pictures of the women who fail to repay the loans, driving some women to suicide.¹⁶

Women have also led the effort to collectivize reproductive labor, both as a means to economize the cost of reproduction and to protect each other from poverty, state violence, and the violence of individual men. An outstanding example is that of the *ollas comunes* (common cooking pots) that women in Chile and Peru set up in the 1980s, when, due to stiff inflation, they could no longer afford to shop alone.¹⁷ Like land reclamations or the formation of tontines, these practices are the expression of a world where communal bonds are still strong. But it would be a mistake to consider them something pre-political, 'natural,' or simply a product of 'tradition.' After repeated phases of colonization, nature and customs no longer exist in any part of the world, except where people have struggled to preserve them and reinvent them. As Leo Podlashuc has noted in "Saving Women: Saving the Commons," grassroots women's communalism today leads to the production of a new reality, shapes a collective identity, constitutes a counterpower in the home and the community, and opens a process of self-valorization and self-determination from which there is much that we can learn.

The first lesson we can gain from these struggles is that the 'commoning' of the material means of reproduction is the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created. It is also the first line of resistance to a life of enslavement and the condition for the construction of autonomous spaces, undermining from within the hold that

capitalism has on our lives. Undoubtedly the experiences I have described are models that cannot be transplanted. For us, in North America, the reclamation and commoning of the means of reproduction must necessarily take different forms. But here too, by pooling our resources and reappropriating the wealth that we have produced, we can begin to de-link our reproduction from the commodity flows that, through the world market, are responsible for the dispossession of millions across the world. We can begin to disentangle our livelihood not only from the world market but also from the war machine and prison system on which the U.S. economy now depends. Not least, we can move beyond the abstract solidarity that so often characterizes relations in the movement, and which limits our commitment, our capacity to endure, and the risks we are willing to take.

In a country where private property is defended by the largest arsenal of weaponry in the world, and where three centuries of slavery have produced profound divisions in the social body, the recreation of the common/s appears as a formidable task that can only be accomplished through a long-term process of experimentation, coalition building, and reparations. Though this task may now seem more difficult than passing through the eye of a needle, it is also the only possibility we have for widening the space of our autonomy and refusing to accept that our reproduction occurs at the expense of the world's other commoners and commons.

Feminist Reconstructions

What this task entails is powerfully expressed by Maria Mies, when she points out that the production of commons requires first a profound transformation in our everyday life, in order to recombine what the social division of labor in capitalism has separated.

The distancing of production from reproduction and consumption leads us to ignore the conditions under which what we eat, wear, or work with have been produced, their social and environmental cost, and the fate of the population on whom the waste we produce is unloaded.¹⁸ In other words, we need to overcome the state of irresponsibility concerning the consequences of our actions that results from the destructive ways in which the social division of labor is organized in capitalism; short of that, the production of our life inevitably becomes a production of death for others. As Mies points out, globalization has worsened this crisis, widening the distances between what is produced and what is consumed, thereby intensifying, despite the appearance of an increased global

interconnectedness, our blindness to the blood in the food we eat, the petroleum we use, the clothes we wear, and the computers we communicate with.¹⁹

Overcoming this state of oblivion is where a feminist perspective teaches us to start in our reconstruction of the commons. No common is possible unless we refuse to base our life and our reproduction on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them. Indeed, if commoning has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject. This is how we must understand the slogan “no commons without community.” But ‘community’ has to be intended not as a gated reality, a grouping of people joined by exclusive interests separating them from others, as with communities formed on the basis of religion or ethnicity, but rather as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation, and of responsibility to each other and to the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals.

Certainly, the achievement of such community, like the collectivization of our everyday reproductive work, can only be a beginning. It is no substitute for broader anti-privatization campaigns and the reclamation of our common wealth. But it is an essential part of our education to collective government and our recognition of history as a collective project, which is perhaps the main casualty of the neoliberal era of capitalism. On this account, we too must include in our political agenda the communalization of housework, reviving that rich feminist tradition that in the U.S. stretches from the utopian socialist experiments of the mid-nineteenth century to the attempts that ‘materialist feminists’ made from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century to reorganize and socialize domestic work, and thereby the home and the neighborhood, through collective housekeeping—attempts that continued until the 1920s when the Red Scare put an end to them.²⁰ These practices and, most importantly, the ability of past feminists to look at reproductive labor as an important sphere of human activity not to be negated but to be revolutionized must be revisited and revalorized.

One crucial reason for creating collective forms of living is that the reproduction of human beings is the most labor-intensive work on earth and, to a very large extent, is irreducible to mechanization. We cannot mechanize childcare, health care, or the psychological work necessary to reintegrate our physical and emotional balance. Despite the efforts that futuristic industrialists are making, we cannot robotize care except

at a terrible cost for the people involved. No one will accept nursebots as caregivers, especially for children and the ill. Shared responsibility and cooperative work not given at the cost of the health of the providers are the only guarantees of proper care. For centuries, the reproduction of human beings has been a collective process. It has been the work of extended families and the communities upon which people could rely, especially in proletarian neighborhoods, even when they lived alone, so that old age was not accompanied by the desolate loneliness and dependence with which so many of our elderly live. It is only with the advent of capitalism that reproduction has been completely privatized, a process that is now extended to a degree that destroys our lives. This trend must be reversed, and the present time is propitious for such a project.

As the capitalist crisis destroys the basic elements of reproduction for millions of people across the world, including in the United States, the reconstruction of our everyday life is a possibility and a necessity. Like strikes, social/economic crises break the discipline of wage work, forcing new forms of sociality upon us. This is what occurred during the Great Depression, which produced a movement of hoboes who turned the freight trains into their commons, seeking freedom in mobility and nomadism.²¹ At the intersections of railroad lines, they organized hobo jungles, prefigurations, with their self-governance rules and solidarity, of the communist world in which many of the hoboes believed.²² But except for a few Boxcar Berthas,²³ this was predominantly a masculine world, a fraternity, and in the long term it could not be sustained. Once the economic crisis and the war came to an end, the hoboes were domesticated by the two great engines of labor power fixation: the family and the house. Mindful of the threat of working-class recomposition during the Depression, American capital excelled in its application of the principle that has characterized the organization of economic life: cooperation at the point of production, separation and atomization at the point of reproduction. The atomized, serialized family house that Levittown provided, compounded by its umbilical appendix, the car, not only made the worker sedentary but put an end to the type of autonomous workers' commons that hobo jungles had represented.²⁴ Today, as millions of American houses and cars are being repossessed, as foreclosures, evictions, and massive loss of employment are again breaking down the pillars of the capitalist discipline of work, new common grounds are again taking shape, like the tent cities that sprawl from coast to coast. This time, however, it

is women who must build the new commons, so that they do not remain transient spaces, temporary autonomous zones, but become the foundation of new forms of social reproduction.

If the house is the *oikos* on which the economy is built, then it is women, historically the houseworkers and house prisoners, who must take the initiative to reclaim the house as a center of collective life, one traversed by multiple people and forms of cooperation, providing safety without isolation and fixation, allowing for the sharing and circulation of community possessions, and, above all, providing the foundation for collective forms of reproduction. As has already been suggested, we can draw inspiration for this project from the programs of the nineteenth-century materialist feminists who, convinced that the home was an important “spatial component of the oppression of women,” organized communal kitchens and cooperative households, calling for workers’ control of reproduction.²⁵

These objectives are crucial at present. Breaking down the isolation of life in the home is not only a precondition for meeting our most basic needs and increasing our power with regard to employers and the state. As Massimo De Angelis has reminded us, it is also a protection from ecological disaster. For there can be no doubt about the destructive consequences of the ‘uneconomic’ multiplication of reproductive assets and the self-enclosed dwellings that we now call our homes, dissipating warmth into the atmosphere during the winter, exposing us to unmitigated heat in the summer. Most importantly, we cannot build an alternative society and a strong self-reproducing movement unless we redefine our reproduction in a more cooperative way and put an end to the separation between the personal and the political and between political activism and the reproduction of everyday life.

It remains to be clarified that assigning women this task of commoning/collectivizing reproduction is not to concede to a naturalistic conception of femininity. Understandably, many feminists view this possibility as a fate worse than death. It is deeply sculpted in our collective consciousness that women have been designated as men’s common, a natural source of wealth and services to be as freely appropriated by them as the capitalists have appropriated the wealth of nature. But, to paraphrase Dolores Hayden, the reorganization of reproductive work, and therefore the reorganization of housing and public space, is not a question of identity; it is a question of labor and, we can add, a question of power and safety.²⁶ I am reminded here of the experience of the women members of the Movimento

dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless People's Movement of Brazil—MST), who, after their communities won the right to maintain the land that they had occupied, insisted that the new houses be built to form one compound so that they could continue to communalize their housework, wash together, cook together, take turns with men, as they had done in the course of the struggle, and be ready to run to give each other support when abused by men. Arguing that women should take the lead in the collectivization of reproductive work and housing is not to naturalize housework as a female vocation. It is refusing to obliterate the collective experiences, the knowledge, and the struggles that women have accumulated concerning reproductive work, whose history has been an essential part of our resistance to capitalism. Reconnecting with this history is a crucial step for women and men today, both to undo the gendered architecture of our lives and to reconstruct our homes and lives as commons.

Notes

- 1 A key source on the politics of the commons and its theoretical foundations is the UK-based online journal *The Commoner*, the fifteenth issue of which was published in 2012. The contents of past issues, reviews, and more are accessible at www.commoner.org.uk.
- 2 A case in point is the struggle taking place in many communities in Maine against Nestlé's appropriation of Maine's waters for its Poland Spring bottled water. Nestlé's theft has made people aware of the vital importance of these waters and the supporting aquifers and has truly reconstituted them as a common; "Nestlé's Move to Bottle Community Water," *Food and Water Watch Fact-Sheet*, July 2009, accessed May 31, 2018, https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/nestle_bottle_community_water_fs_july_2009_1.pdf. Food and Water Watch is a (self-described) "non-profit organization that works to ensure clean water and safe food in the United States and around the world."
- 3 An excellent site for current debates on the commons is the UK-based movement journal *Turbulence: Ideas for Movement* (December 5, 2009): accessed June 2, 2018, http://www.turbulence.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/turbulence_05.pdf.
- 4 For more on this subject, see the important article "Who Pays for the Kyoto Protocol?" by Ana Isla, in *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice*, ed. Ariel Salleh (New York, London: Macmillan Palgrave, 2009), in which the author describes how the conservation of biodiversity has provided the World Bank and other international agencies with the pretext to enclose rain forests on the grounds that they represent 'carbon sinks' and 'oxygen generators.'
- 5 The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, adopted in November 1994, establishes a two-hundred-mile offshore limit, defining an Exclusive

- Economic Zone in which nations can exploit, manage, and protect the resources it contains, from fisheries to natural gas. It also regulates deep-sea mining and the use of the resulting revenues. On the development of the concept of the “common heritage of mankind” in United Nations debate, see Susan J. Buck, *The Global Commons: An Introduction* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1998).
- 6 Ostrom’s work focuses on common pool resources and “on how humans interact with ecosystems to maintain long-term sustainable resource yields”; “Elinor Ostrom,” *Wikipedia*, accessed May 24, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elinor_Ostrom.
 - 7 For more on this topic, see Calestous Juma and J.B. Ojwang, eds., *In Land We Trust: Environment, Private Property and Constitutional Change* (London: Zed Books, 1996), an early treatise on the effectiveness of communal property relations in the context of capitalist development and efforts.
 - 8 David Bollier, *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of Our Common Wealth* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 36–39.
 - 9 Margarita Fernandez, “Cultivating Community, Food and Empowerment,” unpublished manuscript, 2003, 23–26. An early, important work on urban gardens is Bill Weinberg and Peter Lamborn Wilson, ed., *Avant Gardening: Ecological Struggle in the City and the World* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1999).
 - 10 Wilson, *Avant Gardening*.
 - 11 The fishing commons of Maine are currently threatened with a new privatization policy, justified in the name of preservation and ironically labeled ‘catch shares.’ This is a system, already applied in Canada and Alaska, whereby local governments set limits on the amount or fish that can be caught by allocating individual shares on the basis of the amount of fishing that boats have done in the past. This system has proven to be disastrous for small, independent fishers who are soon forced to sell their share to the highest bidders. Protest against its implementation is now mounting in the fishing communities of Maine. See Laurie Schreiber, “Catch Shares or Share-Croppers?” *Fishermen’s Voice* 14, no. 12 (December 2009): accessed June 2, 2018, <http://www.fishermensvoice.com/archives/1209index.html>.
 - 12 It has been calculated, for example, that 33,000 liters of water and 15–19 tons of material are required to produce a personal computer; see Saral Sarkar, *Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism? A Critical Analysis of Humanity’s Fundamental Choices* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 126; Elizabeth Dias, “First Blood Diamonds, Now Blood Computers?” *Time*, July 24, 2009, accessed May 31, 2018, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1912594,00.html>. Dias cites claims made by Global Witness—an organization campaigning to prevent resource related conflicts—to the effect that the trade in the minerals at the heart of the electronic industry feeds the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
 - 13 Donald B. Freeman, “Survival Strategy or Business Training Ground? The Significance of Urban Agriculture for the Advancement of Women in African Cities,” *African Studies Review* 36, no. 3 (December 1993): 1–22; Federici, “Witch-Hunting, Globalization and Feminist Solidarity in Africa

- Today,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 10 no. 1 (October 2008): 29–35, reprinted in Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2018), 60–86.
- 14 Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1989).
 - 15 Leo Podlashuc, “Saving Women: Saving the Commons,” in *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*, ed. Salleh, Ariel (London: Macmillan Palgrave, 2009).
 - 16 I owe this information to Ousseina Alidou, director of the Center for African Studies at Rutgers University in New Jersey.
 - 17 Jo Fisher, *Out of the Shadows: Women, Resistance and Politics in South America* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1993); Carol Andreas, *When Women Rebel: The Rise of Popular Feminism in Peru* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1985).
 - 18 Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalized Economy* (London: Zed Books, 1999).
 - 19 Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, *The Subsistence Perspective*.
 - 20 Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985 [1981]); Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work and Family Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986).
 - 21 George Caffentzis, “Three Temporal Dimensions of Class Struggle,” paper presented at the International Studies Association annual meeting, San Diego, CA, March 2006.
 - 22 Nels Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Caffentzis, “Three Temporal Dimensions of Class Struggle.”
 - 23 *Boxcar Bertha* (Los Angeles: American International Pictures, 1972), 88 min., is Martin Scorsese’s adaptation of Ben Reitman’s *Sister of the Road* (Oakland: AK Press, 2002 [1937]), a fictionalized account presented as the autobiography of a radical and transient named Bertha Thompson.
 - 24 Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*.
 - 25 Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream*.
 - 26 Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, 230.

Marxism, Feminism, and the Commons

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.

—Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*¹

Introduction

What tools, principles, and ideas can Marxism bring to feminist theory and politics in our time? Can we think today of a relationship between Marxism and feminism other than the ‘unhappy marriage’ that Heidi Hartman depicted in a much quoted essay of 1979?² What aspects of Marxism are most important for reimagining feminism and communism in the twenty-first century? And how does Marx’s concept of communism compare with the principle of the commons, the political paradigm inspiring so much radical feminist thinking today?

In asking these questions, I join a conversation on the construction of alternatives to capitalism that has begun in encampments and squares across the planet where, in ways replete with contradictions but creative of new possibilities, a society of ‘commoners’ is coming into existence, striving to build social spaces and relations not governed by the logic of the capitalist market.

Assessing the legacy of Marx’s vision of communism for the twenty-first century is not an easy task, however. Added to the complexity of Marx’s thought is the fact that in the last period of his life, after the defeat

of the Paris Commune, Marx apparently abandoned some of his political axioms, especially with regard to the material preconditions for the construction of a communist society.³ It is also agreed that there are important differences between his two major works, *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*,⁴ and that Marx is not a writer whose thought can be grasped through any set of formulations, as “his level of analysis [was] continuously changing with his political design.”⁵

Two Things, However, Are Certain

The political language that Marx has given us is still necessary to think of a world beyond capitalism. His analysis of surplus value, money, and the commodity form, and, above all, his method—giving history and the class struggle a material foundation and refusing to separate the economic from the political—are still indispensable, though not sufficient, for understanding contemporary capitalism. Not surprisingly, with the deepening of the global economic crisis there has been a revival of interest in Marx that many could not have anticipated in the 1990s, when the dominant wisdom declared his theory defunct. Instead, amid the debris of realized socialism, broad debates have emerged on the questions of ‘primitive accumulation,’ the modalities of the ‘transition,’ and the historical and ethical meaning and possibility of communism. Mixed with feminist, anarchist, antiracist, and queer principles, Marx’s theory continues to influence the disobedients of Europe, the Americas, and beyond. An anticapitalist feminism, then, cannot ignore Marx. Indeed, as Stevi Jackson has argued, “in the early 1980s the dominant perspectives within feminist theory were generally informed by, or formulated in dialogue with, Marxism.”⁶ Yet there is no doubt that Marx’s categories must be given new foundations and we must go “beyond Marx.”⁷ This is not only because of the socioeconomic transformations that have taken place since Marx’s time, but because of the limits in his understanding of capitalist relations—limits whose political significance has been made visible by the social movements of the last half century, which have brought to the world stage social subjects that Marx’s theory ignored or marginalized.

Feminism and the Viewpoint of Social Reproduction

Feminists have made an important contribution to this process, but they have not been alone. In the 1950s and 1960s, in the wake of the anticolonial struggle, political theorists like Frantz Fanon⁸ questioned analyses like

Marx's that almost exclusively focused on wage labor and assumed the vanguard role of the metropolitan proletariat, thus marginalizing the enslaved, the colonized, and the unwaged, among others, in the process of accumulation and anticapitalist struggle. These political theorists realized that the experience of the colonies called for a rethinking "of Marxism as a whole," and that either Marxist theory could be reframed to incorporate the experiences of 75 percent of the world population or it would cease to be a liberating force and become instead an obstacle to it.⁹ The peasants, the peons, and the lumpen, who made the revolutions of the twentieth century, showed no intention of waiting for a future proletarianization, or for 'the development of the productive forces,' to demand a new world order, as orthodox Marxists and the parties of the left would advise them to do.

Ecologists, including some ecosocialists, have also taken Marx to task for promoting an asymmetrical and instrumental view of the man-nature relationship, presenting human beings and labor as the only active agents and denying nature any intrinsic value and self-organizing potential.¹⁰ But it was with the rise of the feminist movement that a more systematic critique of Marxism could be articulated, for feminists brought to the table not only the unwaged of the world but the vast population of social subjects (women, children, occasionally men) whose work in fields, kitchens, bedrooms, and streets daily produces and reproduces the workforce, and with them a set of issues and struggles concerning the organization of social reproduction that Marx and the Marxist political tradition have barely touched upon.

It is starting from this critique that I consider the legacy of Marx's vision of communism, concentrating on those aspects that are most important for a feminist program and for the politics of the commons, by which I refer to the many practices and perspectives embraced by social movements across the planet that today seek to enhance social cooperation, undermine the market's and state's control over our lives, promote the sharing of wealth, and, in this way, set limits to capital accumulation. Anticipating my conclusions, I argue that Marx's vision of communism as a society beyond exchange value, private property, and money, based on associations of free producers, and governed by the principle 'to each according to their needs from each according to their abilities' represents an ideal that no anticapitalist feminist can object to. Feminists can also embrace Marx's inspiring image of a world beyond the social division

of labor, although they may want to ensure that between hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon, and criticizing after dinner, there would remain some time for everyone to share cleaning and childcare. But feminist politics teach us that we cannot accept Marx's conception of what constitutes work and the class struggle, and even more fundamentally we must reject the idea—permeating most of Marx's published work—that capitalism is or has been a necessary stage in the history of human emancipation and a necessary precondition for the construction of a communist society. This must be firmly stated, as the idea that capitalist development enhances workers' autonomy and social cooperation and thereby works toward its own dissolution has proven remarkably intractable.

Far more important for feminist politics than any ideal projection of a postcapitalist society are Marx's relentless critique of capitalist accumulation and his method, beginning with his reading of capitalist development as the product of antagonistic social relations. In other words, as Roman Rosdolsky¹¹ and Antonio Negri,¹² among others, have argued, more than the visionary revolutionary projecting a world of achieved liberation, the Marx who most matters to us is the theorist of class struggle, who refused any political program not rooted in real historical possibilities and throughout his work pursued the destruction of capitalist relations, seeing the realization of communism in the movement that abolishes the present state of things. From this point of view, Marx's historical materialist method, which posits that in order to understand history and society we must understand the material conditions of social reproduction, is crucial for a feminist perspective. Recognizing that social subordination is a historical product rooted in a specific organization of work has had a liberating effect on women. It has denaturalized the sexual division of labor and the identities built upon it, projecting gender categories not only as social constructs but as concepts whose content is constantly redefined, infinitely mobile, open-ended, and always politically charged. Indeed, many feminist debates on the validity of 'women' as an analytic and political category could be more easily resolved if this method were applied, for it teaches us that it is possible to express a common interest without ascribing fixed and uniform forms of behavior and social conditions.

Analyzing the social position of women through the prism of the capitalist exploitation of labor also discloses the continuity between discrimination on the basis of gender and discrimination on the basis of

race and enables us to transcend the politics of rights that assumes the permanence of the existing social order and fails to confront the antagonistic social forces standing in the way of women's liberation. As many feminists have shown, however, Marx did not consistently apply his own method, not at least to the question of reproduction and gender relations. As both the theorists of the Wages for Housework movement—Mariarosa Dalla Costa,¹³ Selma James,¹⁴ and Leopoldina Fortunati¹⁵—and ecofeminist theorists, like Maria Mies¹⁶ and Ariel Salleh,¹⁷ have demonstrated, there is a glaring contradiction at the center of Marx's thought. Although it takes the exploitation of labor as the key element in the production of capitalist wealth, it leaves untheorized some of the activities and social relations that are most essential for the production of labor power, like sexual work, procreation, the care of children, and domestic work. Marx acknowledged that our capacity to work is not a given but is a product of social activity¹⁸ that always takes a specific historical form, for "hunger is hunger, but the hunger that is satisfied by cooked meat eaten with knife and fork is different from the hunger that devours raw meat with the help of hands, nails and teeth."¹⁹ Nevertheless, we do not find in his published work any analysis of domestic labor, the family, and the gender relations specific to capitalism, except for scattered reflections to the effect that the first division of labor was in the sexual act, that slavery is latent in the family, and so forth.²⁰ In volume one of *Capital*, sexual work is never considered even in its paid form, as prostitutes are excluded, together with criminals and vagabonds, even from sphere of the 'paupers,'²¹ clearly associated with that 'lumpenproletariat' that Marx dismissed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* as forever incapable of transforming its social condition.²² Domestic work is dealt with in two footnotes, one registering its disappearance from the homes of the overworked female factory hands during the Industrial Revolution, and the other noting that the crisis caused by the American Civil War brought the female textile workers in England back to their domestic duties.²³ Procreation is generally treated as a natural function,²⁴ rather than a form of labor that in capitalism is subsumed to the reproduction of the workforce and therefore subject to a specific state regulation. Even when presenting his 'relative surplus population' theory,²⁵ Marx barely mentions the interest of capital and the state in women's reproductive capacity, attributing the determination of a surplus population to the requirements of technological innovation,²⁶ although arguing that the exploitation of the workers' children set a premium on their production.²⁷

Because of these omissions many feminists have accused Marx of reductionism and viewed the integration of feminism and Marxism as a process of subordination.²⁸ The authors I have quoted, however, have demonstrated that we can work with Marx's categories,²⁹ but we must reconstruct them and change their architectural order, so that the center of gravity is not exclusively wage labor and commodity production but the production and reproduction of labor power, especially that part of it that is carried out by women in the home. For in doing so, we make visible a new terrain of accumulation and struggle, as well as the full extent of capital's dependence on unpaid labor and the full length of the working day.³⁰ Indeed, by expanding Marx's theory of productive work to include reproductive labor in its different dimensions, we can not only craft a theory of gender relations in capitalism but gain a new understanding of the class struggle and the means by which capitalism reproduces itself through the creation of different labor regimes and different forms of uneven development and underdevelopment.

Placing the reproduction of labor power at the center of capitalist production unearths a world of social relations that remains invisible in Marx but is essential to exposing the mechanisms that regulate the exploitation of labor. It discloses that the unpaid labor that capital extracts from the working class is far greater than Marx ever imagined, extending to both the domestic work that women have been expected to perform and the exploitation of the colonies and peripheries of the capitalist world. There is a continuity, in fact, between the devaluation of the reproduction of labor power that takes place in the home and the devaluation of the labor employed in the many plantations that capitalism has constructed in the regions it has colonized, as well as in the heartlands of industrialization. In both cases, not only have the forms of work and coercion involved been naturalized, but both have become part of a global assembly line designed to cut the cost of reproducing the waged workers. On this line, the unpaid domestic labor ascribed to women as their natural destiny joins with and relays the work of millions of campesinas, subsistence farmers, and informal laborers, growing and producing for a pittance the commodities that waged workers consume or providing at the lowest cost the services their reproduction requires. Hence the hierarchies of labor that so much racist and sexist ideology has tried to justify, but which only demonstrate that the capitalist class has maintained its power through a system of indirect rule, effectively dividing the working class, with the wage used to delegate

to the male workers' power over the unwaged, starting with the control and supervision of women's bodies and labor. This means that the wage is not only the terrain of confrontation between labor and capital—the terrain on which the working class negotiates the quantity and constitution of socially necessary work—but is also an instrument for the creation of unequal power relations and hierarchies between workers, and that workers' cooperation in the labor process is by no means sufficient to unify the working class. Consequently, the class struggle is a far more complicated process than Marx assumed. As feminists have discovered, it must often begin in the family, since in order to fight capitalism women have had to fight with their husbands and fathers, in the same way that people of color have had to fight against white workers and the particular type of class composition that capitalism imposes through the wage relation. Last, recognizing that domestic work is labor that produces the workforce enables us to understand gender identities as work functions and gender relations as relations of production, a move that liberates women from the guilt we have suffered whenever we have wanted to refuse domestic work and amplifies the significance of the feminist principle that 'the personal is the political.'

Why did Marx overlook that very part of reproductive work that is most essential to the production of labor power? Elsewhere,³¹ I have suggested that the conditions of the working class in England in his time may provide an explanation, since when Marx was writing *Capital*, very little housework was performed in the working-class family (as Marx himself recognized), for women were employed side by side with men in the factories from dawn to sunset. Housework, as a branch of capitalist production, was below Marx's historical and political horizon. Only in the second part of the nineteenth century, after two decades of working-class revolts in which the specter of communism haunted Europe, did the capitalist class begin to invest in the reproduction of labor power, in conjunction with a shift in the form of accumulation, from light (textile-based) to heavy (coal- and steel-based) industry, requiring a more intensive labor discipline and a less emaciated workforce. As I wrote in a recent essay, "In Marxian terms, we can say that the development of reproductive work and the consequent emergence of the full-time proletarian housewife were in part the products of the transition from 'absolute' to 'relative surplus' value extraction as a mode of exploitation of labor."³² They were the product of a shift from a system of exploitation based on

the absolute lengthening of the working day to one in which the reduction of the workday would be compensated by a technological revolution intensifying the rate of exploitation. But a further factor was certainly the capitalists' fear that the superexploitation to which workers were subjected, due to the absolute extension of the workday and the destruction of their commons, was leading to the extinction of the working class and influencing women's refusal of housework and childcare—a frequent theme in the official reports that the English government ordered starting in the 1840s to assess the factory worker's conditions and state of health.³³ It was at this junction that a labor reform increasing capital's investment (of funds and work) in the reproduction of the workforce was introduced, promoting a series of Factory Acts that first reduced and then eliminated women's factory employment, and substantially increased (by 40 percent by the end of the century) the male wage.³⁴ In this sense, the birth of the full-time proletarian housewife—a phenomenon that Fordism accelerated—can be read as an attempt to restore to the male waged workers, in the form of a vast pool of women's unpaid labor, the commons that they had lost with the advent of capitalism.

These reforms marked “the passage to the modern state” as planner of the construction of the working-class family and the reproduction of the workforce.³⁵ But what most stood out when Marx was writing *Capital* was certainly that workers could not reproduce themselves. This can partly explain why housework is almost nonexistent in his work. It is likely, however, that Marx also ignored domestic labor because it represented the very type of work that he believed modern industry would and should replace, and he failed to see that the coexistence of different labor regimes would remain an essential component of capitalist production and work discipline.

I suggest that Marx ignored domestic labor because it lacked the characteristics that he considered essential to the capitalist organization of work, which he identified with large-scale industrialization—in his view the highest model of production. Being home-based, organized in a noncollective, noncooperative manner, and performed at a low level of technological development, even in the twentieth century at the peak of domesticity, housework has continued to be classified by Marxists as a vestigial remnant of precapitalist forms of production. As Dolores Hayden has pointed out in *The Grand Domestic Revolution*,³⁶ even when they called for socialized domestic work, socialist thinkers did not believe it could

ever be meaningful work³⁷ and, like August Bebel, envisioned a time when housework would be reduced to a minimum.³⁸ It took a women's revolt against housework in the 1960s and 1970s to prove that domestic work is "socially necessary labor"³⁹ in the capitalist sense, that even though it is not organized on an industrial basis, it is extremely productive, and that to a large extent it is work that cannot be mechanized; for reproducing the individuals in which labor power subsists requires a variety of emotional as well as physical services that are interactive in nature and therefore very labor intensive. This realization has further destabilized Marx's theoretical and political framework, forcing us to rethink one of the main tenets of Marx's theory of revolution, that is, the assumption that with the development of capitalism all forms of work will be industrialized and, most important, that capitalism and modern industry are preconditions for the liberation of humanity from exploitation.

Machinery, Modern Industry, and Reproduction

Marx presumed that capitalism and modern industry must set the stage for the advent of communism, because he believed that without a leap in the productivity of work that industrialization provides humanity would be condemned to an endless conflict motivated by scarcity, destitution, and the competition for the necessities of life.⁴⁰ He also viewed modern industry as the embodiment of a higher rationality, making its way into the world through sordid motives but teaching human beings attitudes apt to develop our capacities to the fullest, as well as liberating us from work. For Marx, modern industry is not only the means to reduce 'socially necessary labor,' but is also the very model of work, teaching workers uniformity, regularity, and the principles of technological development, thereby enabling us to engage interchangeably in different kinds of labor,⁴¹ something (he reminds us) the detailed worker of manufacture and even the artisan tied to the *métier* could never achieve.

Capitalism, in this context, is the rough hand that brings large-scale industry into existence, clearing the way for the concentration of the means of production and cooperation in the work process, developments Marx considered essential for the expansion of the productive forces and an increase in the productivity of work. Capitalism is also for him the whip that schools human beings in the requirements of self-government, like the necessity to produce beyond subsistence and the capacity for social cooperation on a large scale.⁴² Class struggle plays an important role in

this process. Workers' resistance to exploitation forces the capitalist class to revolutionize production in such a way as to further economize labor in a sort of mutual conditioning, continually reducing the role of work in the production of wealth and replacing with machines the tasks that human beings have historically tried to escape. Marx believed that once this process was completed, once modern industry reduced socially necessary labor to a minimum, an era would begin in which we would finally be the masters of our existence and our natural environment, and we would not only be able to satisfy our needs but would be free to dedicate our time to higher pursuits.

How this rupture would occur he did not explain, except through a set of metaphoric images suggesting that once fully developed the forces of production would break the shell enveloping them triggering a social revolution. Again, he did not clarify how we would recognize when the forces of production should be mature enough for revolution, only suggesting that the turning point would come with the worldwide extension of capitalist relations, when the homogenization and universalization of the forces of production and the correspondent capacities in the proletariat would reach a global dimension.⁴³

Nevertheless, his vision of a world in which human beings can use machines to free themselves from want and toil and free time becomes the measure of wealth has exercised an immense attraction. André Gorz's image of a postindustrial workless society where people dedicate themselves to their self-development owes much to it.⁴⁴ Witness also the fascination among Italian Autonomist Marxists with the "Fragment on Machines" in the *Grundrisse*, the site in which this vision is most boldly presented. Antonio Negri in particular, in *Marx beyond Marx*, has singled it out as the most revolutionary aspect of Marx's theory. Indeed, the pages of "Notebooks VI and VII," where Marx describes a world in which the law of value has ceased to function, science and technology having eliminated living labor from the production process and the workers only acting as the machines' supervisors, are breathtaking in their anticipatory power.⁴⁵ Yet, as feminists in particular, we are today in a good position to see how illusory are the powers that an automated system of production can place at our disposal. We can see that "the allegedly highly productive industrial system" that Marx so much admired, "has been in reality a parasite on the earth, the likes of which have never been seen in the history of humanity,"⁴⁶ and is now consuming it at a velocity that casts a long shadow

on the future. Ahead of his time in recognizing the interplay of humanity and nature, as Saileh noted,⁴⁷ Marx intuited this process, observing that the industrialization of agriculture depletes the soil as much as it depletes the worker.⁴⁸ But he obviously believed that this trend could be reversed, that once taken over by the workers the means of production could be redirected to serve positive objectives, that they could be used to expand the social and natural wealth rather than deplete it, and that the demise of capitalism was so imminent as to limit the damage a profit-bound industrialization process inflicted on the earth.

On all these counts he was deeply mistaken. Machines are not produced by machines in a sort of immaculate conception. Taking the computer as an example, even this most common machine is an ecological disaster, requiring tons of soil and water and an immense amount of human labor for its production. Multiplied by the order of billions, we must conclude that, like sheep in sixteenth-century England, machines today are ‘eating the earth’ and at such a fast pace that even if a revolution were to take place in the near future, the work required to make this planet habitable again would be astounding.⁴⁹ Machines moreover require a material and cultural infrastructure that affects not only our nature commons—lands, woods, waters, mountains, seas, rivers, and coastlines—but also our psyche and social relations, molding subjectivities, creating new needs and habits, and producing dependencies that also place a mortgage on the future. This partly explains why, a century and a half after the publication of *Capital*, Vol. 1, capitalism gives no sign of dissolving, though the objective conditions that Marx envisioned as necessary for social revolution would seem more than mature. What we witness, instead, is a regime of permanent primitive accumulation reminiscent of the sixteenth-century enclosures, this time organized by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, with a cohort of mining and agribusiness companies that in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are privatizing communal lands and expropriating small-scale producers to acquire the lithium, coltan, and diamonds modern industry requires.⁵⁰ We must also stress that none of the means of production that capitalism has developed can be unproblematically taken over and applied to a different use. In the same way—as we will see later—that we cannot take over the state, we cannot take over capitalist industry, science, and technology, as the exploitative objectives for which they have been created shape their constitution and mode of operation.

That modern industry and technology cannot simply be appropriated and reprogrammed for different purposes is best demonstrated by the growth of the nuclear and chemical industries, which have poisoned the planet and provided the capitalist class with an immense arsenal of weapons now threatening us with annihilation or, at the very least, with the mutual destruction of the contending classes. As Otto Ullrich has put it, "The most outstanding achievement of scientized technology has undoubtedly been the increase in the destructive power of the war machine."⁵¹ Similarly, the capitalist rational treatment of agriculture that Marx contrasted to presumably the irrational method of cultivation of the small producer⁵² has destroyed the abundance, diversity, and value of food and much of it will have to be discarded in a society where production is for human beings rather than being humanity's goal.

There is another consideration that makes us question Marx's concept of the function of technology in the formation of a communist society, especially when examined from a feminist viewpoint. A machine-based communism relies on an organization of work that excludes the most basic activities human beings perform on this planet. As I have mentioned, the reproductive work that Marx's analysis bypasses is, to a large extent, work that cannot be mechanized. In other words, Marx's vision of a society in which necessary labor can be drastically reduced through automation clashes with the fact that the largest amount of work on earth is of a highly relational nature and hardly subject to mechanization. Ideally in a post-capitalist society we would mechanize several household chores, and we would certainly rely on new forms of communication for company, learning, and information, once we controlled what technology is produced, for what purposes, and under what conditions. But how can we mechanize washing, cuddling, consoling, dressing, and feeding a child, providing sexual services, or assisting those who are ill or the elderly and not self-sufficient? What machine could incorporate the skills and affects needed for these tasks? Attempts have been made with the creation of nursebots⁵³ and interactive lovebots, and it is possible that in the future we may see the production of mechanical mothers. But even assuming that we could afford such devices, we must wonder at what emotional cost we would introduce them in our homes in replacement of living labor. But if reproductive work can only in part be mechanized, then the Marxian scheme that makes the expansion of material wealth dependent on automation and the reduction of necessary labor implodes; for domestic work, and

especially the care of children, constitutes most of the work on this planet. The very concept of socially necessary labor loses much of its cogency. How is socially necessary labor to be defined if the largest and most indispensable sector of work on the planet is not recognized as an essential part of it? And by what criteria and principles will the organization of care work, sexual work, and procreation be governed if these activities are not considered part of social necessary labor?

The increasing skepticism about the possibility of substantially reducing domestic work through mechanization is one of the reasons why there is now among feminists a renewed interest and experimentation with more collective forms of reproduction and the creation of reproductive commons,⁵⁴ redistributing work among a larger number of subjects than the nuclear family provides. Exemplary here is the Grand Domestic Revolution, an ongoing living research project inspired by Dolores Hayden's work, initiated by feminist artists, designers, and activists in Utrecht (Holland) to explore how the domestic sphere, as well as the neighborhoods and the cities, can be transformed and 'new forms of living and working in common' can be constructed. Meanwhile, under the pressure of the economic crisis, struggles in defense of our natural commons (lands, waters, forests) and the creation of commoning activities (e.g., collective shopping and cooking, urban gardening) are multiplying. It is also significant that "colonization and tech transfer notwithstanding, the bulk of the world's daily needs continue to be supplied by Third World women food growers outside the cash nexus" and with very limited technological inputs, often farming on unused public land.⁵⁵ At a time of genocidal austerity programs, the work of these female farmers is the difference between life and death for millions.⁵⁶ Yet this is the very type of subsistence-oriented work that Marx believed should be eliminated, as he considered the rationalization of agriculture—that is, its organization on a large scale and on a scientific basis—"one of the great merits of the capitalist mode of production" and argued that this was possible only through the expropriation of the direct producer.⁵⁷

On the Myth of the Progressiveness of Capitalism

While a critique of Marx's theory concerning the power of industrialization to free humanity from toil and want is in order, there are other reasons his belief in the necessity and progressiveness of capitalism must be rejected. First, this theory underestimates the knowledge and wealth

produced by noncapitalist societies and the extent to which capitalism has built its power through their appropriation—a key consideration if we are not to be mesmerized by the capitalist advancement of knowledge and paralyzed in our will to exit from it. Indeed, it is politically important for us to recall that the societies capitalism destroyed achieved high levels of knowledge and technology thousands of years before the advent of mechanization, learning to navigate the seas across vast expanses of water, discovering by night watches the main astral constellations, inventing the crops that have sustained human life on the planet.⁵⁸ Witness the fantastic diversity of seeds and plants that the Native American populations were able to develop, reaching a mastery in agricultural technology so far unsurpassed, with more than two hundred varieties of corn and potatoes invented just in Mesoamerica—a stark contrast to the destruction of diversity we witness at the hands of the scientifically organized capitalist agriculture of our time.⁵⁹

Capitalism did not invent social cooperation or large-scale intercourse, as Marx called trade and cultural exchanges. On the contrary, the advent of capitalism destroyed societies that had been tied by communal property relations and cooperative forms of work, as well as large trade networks. Highly cooperative work systems were the norm prior to colonization from the Indian Ocean to the Andes. We can recall the *ayllu* system in Bolivia and Peru and the communal land systems of Africa that have survived into the twenty-first century, all counterpoints to Marx's view concerning the "isolation of rural life."⁶⁰ In Europe, as well, capitalism destroyed a society of commons materially grounded not only in the collective use of land and collective work relations but in the daily struggle against feudal power, which created new cooperative forms of life, such as those experimented with by the heretic movements (Cathars, Waldensians) that I analyzed in *Caliban and the Witch*.⁶¹ Not accidentally, capitalism could only prevail through a maximum of violence and destruction, including the extermination of thousands of women through two centuries of witch hunts, which broke a resistance that by the sixteenth century had taken the form of peasant wars. Far from being a carrier of progress, the development of capitalism was the counterrevolution, as it subverted the rise of new forms of communalism produced in the struggle, as well as those existing on the feudal manors on the basis of the shared use of the commons. Add that much more than the development of large-scale industry is needed to create the revolutionary combination and association of free producers

that Marx envisioned at the very end of *Capital*, Vol. 1.⁶² Capital and large-scale industry may boost the “concentration of the means of production” and the cooperation in the work process that results from the division of labor,⁶³ but the cooperation required for a revolutionary process is qualitatively different from the technical factor that Marx describes as being (together with science and technology) the “fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production.”⁶⁴ It is even questionable whether we can speak of cooperation with regard to work relations that are not controlled by the workers themselves and therefore produce no independent decision-making, except at the moment of resistance when the capitalist organization of the work process is subverted. We also cannot ignore that the cooperation that Marx admired as the mark of the capitalist organization of work has historically become possible precisely on the basis of the destruction of workers’ skills and cooperation in their struggle.⁶⁵

Second, to assume that capitalist development has been inevitable, not to mention necessary or desirable, at any time in history, past or present, is to place ourselves on the other side of the struggles of people who have resisted it. But can we say that the heretics, the Anabaptists, the Diggers, the maroons, and all the rebel subjects who resisted the enclosures of their commons or fought to construct an egalitarian social order, writing, like Thomas Müntzer, *omnia sunt communia* (all property should be held in common) on their banners, were on the wrong side of history, viewed from the perspective of human liberation? This is not an idle question. For the extension of capitalist relations is not a thing of the past but an ongoing process, still requiring blood and fire, and still generating an immense resistance which undoubtedly is putting a brake to the capitalist subsumption of every form of production on earth and the extension of waged labor.

Third, to posit capitalism as necessary and progressive is to underestimate a fact on which I have insisted throughout this chapter: capitalist development is not, or is not primarily, the development of human capacities and above all the capacity for social cooperation, as Marx anticipated. It is also the development of unequal power relations, hierarchies, and divisions, which, in turn, generate ideologies, interests, and subjectivities that constitute a destructive social force. Not accidentally, in the face of the most concerted neoliberal drive to privatize the remaining communal and public resources, it has been not the most industrialized but the most cohesive communities that have been able to resist and, in some cases,

reverse the privatization tide. As the struggles of indigenous people—the struggle of the Quechua and Aymara against the privatization of water in Bolivia⁶⁶ and the struggles of the U'wa people in Colombia against the destruction of their lands by oil drilling, among other examples—have demonstrated, it is not where capitalist development is the highest but where communal bonds are the strongest that capitalist expansion is put on hold and even forced to recede. Indeed, as the prospect of a world revolution fueled by capitalist development recedes, the reconstitution of communities devastated by racist and sexist policies and multiple rounds of enclosure appears not just an objective condition but as a precondition of social change.

From Communism to the Commons: A Feminist Perspective

Opposing the divisions that capitalism has created on the basis of race, gender, and age, reuniting what it has separated in our lives and reconstituting a collective interest must then be a political priority for feminists and other social justice movements today. This is what is ultimately at stake in the politics of the commons, which, at its best, presupposes a sharing of wealth, collective decision-making, and a revolution in our relationship with ourselves and others. The social cooperation and knowledge building that Marx attributed to industrial work can be constructed only through commoning activities—urban gardening, time banking, open sourcing—that are self-organized and require, as well as produce, community. In this sense, insofar as it aims to reproduce our lives in ways that strengthen mutual bonds and set limits to capital accumulation,⁶⁷ the politics of the commons, in part, translates Marx's idea of communism as the abolition of the present state of things. It could also be argued that with the development of online commons—the rise of the free software and free culture movements—we are now approximating that universalization of human capacities that Marx anticipated as a result of the development of productive forces. But the politics of the commons is a radical departure from what communism has signified in the Marxist tradition and in much of Marx's work, starting with *The Communist Manifesto*. There are several crucial differences between the politics of the commons and communism that stand out, especially when we consider these political forms from a feminist and ecological viewpoint.

Commons, as discussed by feminist writers like Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, and Ariel Salleh and practiced by grassroots women's organizations,

do not depend for their realization on the development of the productive forces or the mechanization of production, or any global extension of capitalist relations—the preconditions for Marx’s communist project. On the contrary, they contend with the threats posed to them by capitalist development and revalorize locale-specific knowledges and technologies.⁶⁸ They do not assume that there is a necessary connection between scientific/technological and moral/intellectual development, which is an underlying premise of Marx’s conception of social wealth. They also place at the center of their political project the restructuring of reproduction as the crucial terrain for the transformation of social relations, thus subverting the value structure of capitalist organization of work. In particular, they attempt to break down the isolation that has characterized domestic work in capitalism, not in view of its reorganization on an industrial scale but in view of creating more cooperative forms of care work.

Commons are declined in the plural, in the spirit promoted by the Zapatistas, with the slogan “One No, Many Yeses,” which recognizes the existence of diverse historical and cultural trajectories and the multiplicity of social outcomes that are compatible with the abolition of exploitation. For while it is recognized that the circulation of ideas and technological know-how can be a positive historical force, the prospect of a universalization of knowledges, institutions, and forms of behavior is increasingly opposed not only as a colonial legacy but as a project achievable only through the destruction of local lives and cultures. Above all, commons do not depend for their existence on a supporting state. Though in radical circles there is still a lingering desire for the state as a transitional form, presumably required to eradicate entrenched capitalist interests and administer those elements of the commonwealth that demand large-scale planning (water, electricity, transport services, etc.), the state form is today in crisis, and not only in feminist and other radical circles. Indeed, the popularity of the politics of the commons is directly related to the crisis of the state form, which the failure of realized socialism and the internationalization of capital has made dramatically evident. As John Holloway has powerfully put it in *Change the World without Taking Power*, to imagine that we can use the state to bring forth a more just world is to attribute an autonomous existence to it, abstract from its network of social relations, which inextricably tie it to capital accumulation and compel it to reproduce social conflict and mechanisms of exclusion. It is also to ignore the fact “that capitalist social relations have never been

limited by state frontiers” but are globally constituted.⁶⁹ Moreover, with a world proletariat divided by gender and racial hierarchies, the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ concretized in a state form would risk becoming the dictatorship of the white/male sector of the working class. For those with more social power might very well steer the revolutionary process toward objectives that maintain the privileges they have acquired.

After decades of betrayed expectations and electoral ballots, there is now a profound desire, especially among younger people in every country, to reclaim the power to transform our lives, to reclaim the knowledge and responsibility that in a proletarian state we would alienate to an overarching institution that in representing us would replace us. This would be a disastrous turn. For rather than creating a new world, we would forfeit that process of self-transformation without which no new society is possible and reconstitute the very conditions that today make us passive even in front of the most egregious cases of institutional injustice. It is one of the attractions of the commons as the “embryonic form of a new society” that it stands for a power that comes from the ground, rather than from the state and relies on cooperation and collective forms of decision-making rather than coercion.⁷⁰ In this sense, the spirit of the commons resonates with Audre Lorde’s insight that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,”⁷¹ and I believe that if Marx lived today he would agree on this point. For though he did not much dwell on the ravages produced by the capitalist organization of sexism and racism and gave scarce attention to the transformation in the subjectivity of the proletariat, he nevertheless understood that we need a revolution to liberate ourselves not only from external constraints but from the internalization of capitalist ideology and relations, from, as he put it, “all the muck of ages,” so that we become “fitted to found society anew.”⁷²

Notes

- 1 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Part 1, ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 56–57.
- 2 Heidi I. Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” *Capital and Class* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 1–33.
- 3 This argument is based on readings of Marx’s “Ethnological Notebooks,” notes he collected in the last years of his life in preparation for a major work on the topic. His comments here show that Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society*, “and especially its detailed account of the Iroquois, for the first time

- gave Marx insights into the concrete possibilities of a free society as it had actually existed in history” and of a revolutionary path not dependent on the development of capitalist relations. Rosemont argues that Morgan was on Marx’s mind when in correspondence with Russian revolutionaries he considered the possibility of a revolutionary process in Russia moving directly to communal forms of ownership on the basis of the Russian peasant commune, rather than through its dissolution. See Franklin Rosemont, “Karl Marx and the Iroquois,” July 7, 2009, accessed June 2, 2018, <http://libcom.org/library/karl-rnax-iroquois-franklin-rosemant>. On this subject, see also Kevin B. Anderson, “Marx’s Late Writings on Non-Western and Precapitalist Societies and Gender,” *Rethinking Marxism* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 84–96; Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the “Peripheries of Capitalism”* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 29–31.
- 4 Antonio Negri, for instance, has claimed that the *Grundrisse* should be seen as the culmination of Marx’s thought and that the importance of *Capital* has been overestimated, for it is in the *Grundrisse* that Marx developed his major concepts and the most radical definition of communism. See Antonio Negri, *Marx beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, ed. Jim Fleming, trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan, and Maurizio Viano (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991), 5–4, 8–9, 11–18. By contrast, George Caffentzis argues that *Capital* has a more integrative concept of capitalism and that in this later work Marx discarded some of the main theses in the *Grundrisse*, like the thesis that capitalism, through the automation of production, can go beyond the law of value. See Caffentzis, “From the *Grundrisse* to *Capital* and Beyond: Then and Now,” *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* no. 15 (September 2008): 59–74, accessed June 2, 2018, <http://ices.library.ubc.ca/index.php/workplace/article/view/182216>.
 - 5 Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* (London: Zed Books, 1997), 71; Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
 - 6 Stevi Jackson, “Why a Materialist Feminism Is (Still) Possible,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 24, no. 3–4 (May 2001): 284.
 - 7 Negri, *Marx beyond Marx*.
 - 8 As Frantz Fanon wrote: “This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem. Everything up to and including the very nature of precapitalist society, so well explained by Marx, must here be thought out again”; Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1986), 40.
 - 9 Roderick Thurton, “Marxism in the Caribbean,” in *Two Lectures by Roderick Thurton: A Second Memorial Pamphlet* (New York: George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici, 2000).
 - 10 See, for instance, Joel Kovel, “On Marx and Ecology,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 22, no. 1 (September 2011): 11–14. Kovel argues that Marx remained prisoner of a scientist and productivistic viewpoint postulating “a passive nature worked over by an active Man,” and encouraging the “all-out development of the productive forces” (13, 15). There is, however, a broad debate on

the subject to which I can only cursorily refer. See, for instance, John Bellamy Foster, "Marx and the Environment," *Monthly Review* 47, no. 3 (July–August 1995): 108–23.

- 11 Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's "Capital"* (London: Pluto Press, 1977).
- 12 Negri, *Marx beyond Marx*.
- 13 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, eds. Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975).
- 14 Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975).
- 15 Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*, ed. Jim Fleming, trans. Hillary Creek (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1995).
- 16 Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (London: Zed Books, 1986).
- 17 Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*.
- 18 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 274. As he writes, "the value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently, also the reproduction of this specific article. In so far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average social labor objectified in it. Labour-power exists only as a capacity of the living individual. Its production consequently presupposes his existence. Given the existence of the individual, the production of labour-power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance."
- 19 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Maurice Dobb (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 197.
- 20 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 51–52.
- 21 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 797.
- 22 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (New York: International Publishers, 1963).
- 23 This occurs in a footnote, in "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry," commenting on the growing substitution of female for male workers, resulting from the introduction of machinery in the factory, "throwing every member of the family onto the labor market." He writes: "Since certain family functions, such as nursing and suckling children, cannot be entirely suppressed, the mothers who have been confiscated by capital must try substitutes of some sort. Domestic work, such as sowing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made articles. Hence the diminished expenditure of labour in the house is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money outside. The cost of production of the working-class family therefore increases"; Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1., 518n. Referring to this passage Leopoldina Fortunati has noted that "Marx managed to see housework only when capital destroyed it, and saw it through reading government reports which had realized the

- problems posed by the usurpation of housework far earlier"; Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction*, 169.
- 24 Marx writes, for instance, that "the natural increase of the workers does not satisfy the requirements of the accumulation of capital"; Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 794.
- 25 *Capital*, Vol. 1, 794–97.
- 26 *Capital*, Vol. 1, 782.
- 27 *Capital*, Vol. 1, 795. Marx does not clarify, however, who determines this increased production—an apt question given that in *Capital*, Vol. 1, his descriptions of maternal relations in England's industrial districts indicates a widespread refusal of mothering such as to preoccupy the contemporary policymakers and employers; *Capital*, Vol. 1, 521, 521n, 522.
- 28 Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage," 1.
- 29 An exception is Maria Mies, who has repeatedly stated that within Marxism it is impossible to think gender relations; Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*.
- 30 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 38.
- 31 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 94–95. For an analysis and critique of Marx's conceptualization of the reproduction of labor-power, see also Federici, "Capital and Gender," in *Reading 'Capital' Today*, eds. Ingo Schmidt and Carlo Fanelli (London, Pluto Press, 2017), 79–96.
- 32 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Chapter 16, Part V.
- 33 *Capital*, Vol. 1, 348, 591, 599, 630. The last three page numbers cited here discuss the effect of women's factory employment on their discipline and reproductive work. As Marx put it, "Aside from the daily more threatening advance of the working-class movement, the limiting of factory labor was dictated by the same necessity as forced the manuring of English fields with guano. The same blind desire for profit that in one case exhausted the soil had in the other case seized hold of the vital force of the nation at its roots."
- 34 It is no coincidence that by 1870 we simultaneously have in England both a new Marriage Act and the Education Act (which introduced the right to universal primary education), both signifying a new level of investment in the reproduction of the workforce. Starting in the same period, hand in hand with the hike in the family wage, we have a change in the eating habits of people in Britain, and the means of food distribution, with the appearance of the first neighborhood food shops. In the same period the sewing machine begins to enter the proletarian home. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: The Making of Modern English Society*, Vol. 2, 1750 to the Present Day (New York: Random House, 1968), 135–36, 141.
- 35 Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction*, 173.
- 36 Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985 [1981]).
- 37 Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, 6.
- 38 August Bebel, *Women under Socialism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

- 39 “Socially necessary labour-time is the labour-time required to produce any use value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society”; Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 129.
- 40 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 56.
- 41 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 618.
- 42 *Capital*, Vol. 1, 775.
- 43 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 55–56; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel More (New York: Penguin, 1967).
- 44 André Gorz, *A Farewell to the Working Class* (London: Pluto, 1982); Gorz, *Paths to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work* (London: Pluto, 1985); on this subject, see also Edward Granter, *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 121. Granter points out that Gorz’s idea of a society in which free time is a measure of wealth is a Marxian idea, and in fact Gorz makes explicit reference to Marx with quotes from the *Grundrisse*.
- 45 Negri, *Marx beyond Marx*.
- 46 Otto Ullrich, “Technology,” in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, ed. Wolfgang Sachs (London: Zed Books, 1993), 281.
- 47 Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*, 70.
- 48 As he wrote in *Capital*, Vol. 1, at the end of the chapter on “Machinery and Large-Scale Industry”: “all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development, as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker”; Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 638.
- 49 Think, for example, of the work necessary to monitor and neutralize the damaging effects of the nuclear waste piles accumulated across the globe.
- 50 See Federici, “War, Globalization and Reproduction,” in *Revolution at Point Zero*, 76–84; Federici, “Women, Land Struggles, and the Reconstruction of the Commons,” *Working USA* 14, no. 1 (March 2011); Federici, “Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 10, no. 1 (October 2008): 29–35, reprinted in Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2018), 60–86.
- 51 Ullrich, “Technology!,” 227.
- 52 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 3, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1991), 948–49.
- 53 Nancy Folbre, “Nursebots to the Rescue? Immigration, Automation, and Care,” *Globalizations* 3, no. 3 (September 2006): 356.

- 54 On this subject, see Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons in an Era of Primitive Accumulation," in *Revolution at Point Zero*, 138–48.
- 55 Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*, 79; Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons," 138–48.
- 56 According to the United Nations Population Fund, in 2001, "some 200 million city dwellers" were growing food "providing about 1 billion people with at least part of their food supply"; United Nations Population Fund, *State of the World Population 2001: Footprints and Milestones: Population and Environmental Change* (New York: United Nations, 2001). A Worldwatch Institute report, "Farming the Cities Feeding an Urban Future," June 16, 2011, accessed June 4, 2018, <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/8448> confirms the importance of subsistence farming, noting in a press release: "Currently an estimated 800 million people worldwide are engaged in urban agriculture, producing 15–20 percent." It should be noted that these figures do not include subsistence farming in the rural areas; Worldwatch Institute, "State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet," accessed June 2, 2018, <http://www.worldwatch.org/sow11>.
- 57 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, 754–55.
- 58 Clifford D. Conner, *A People's History of Science: Miners, Midwives, and "Low Mechanics"* (New York: Nation Books, 2005).
- 59 Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1988).
- 60 On this translation, see Hal Draper, *The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto* (Berkeley: Center for Socialist History, 1994).
- 61 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004).
- 62 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 930n.
- 63 *Capital*, Vol. 1, 927.
- 64 *Capital*, Vol. 1, 454.
- 65 On this subject, see Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 563–68. In "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry," section 5, "The Struggle between Worker and Machine," Marx writes: "The instrument of labor strikes down the worker." Not only do the capitalists use machines to free themselves from dependence on labor, but machinery is "the most powerful method for suppressing strikes. . . . It would be possible to write a whole history of the inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working-class revolt"; *Capital*, Vol. 1, 562–63.
- 66 Raquel Guitérrez Aguilar, *Los ritmos del Pachakuti: levantamiento y movilización en Bolivia (2000–2005)* (Mexico: Sisifo Ediciones, 2009).
- 67 Massimo De Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).
- 68 Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1993); *The Ecologist, Whose Common Future? Reclaiming the Commons* (London: Earthscan, 1993).
- 69 John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2002) 14, 95.

- 70 John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 29.
- 71 Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House,"
in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds.
Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table, 1983), 98–101.
- 72 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 95.