

**self
interview
no.4**

**don't explain:
on wages for housework as a
non-demand**

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Nina: Say something marxists might say about other marxists when they want to undermine them.

Dusty: The neatest trick is the old pulling the rug out from under statements. In order to effect the dismissal of a long passage whilst at the same time staking a more fundamental claim, they will say of 'formal subsumption', *capital is not a "thing" or substance, but a social relation of command over living labour.*

Nina: Is that a way into this discussion?

Dusty: I think so. Selma James recently said, 'Wages for housework was not simply a demand at all, but a political perspective.'

Nina: Do you mean *wages for housework* is a thing or a relation? It seems she thinks it is a sort of framing device through which relations become objects, and objects are exposed as relations.

Dusty: *Wages for housework* is a thing, a concept which fixes a theoretical process that is developing over time. The term itself names various objects at various stages of progress. The fixing of the term also supposes that this thing, this concept, is also the product of the numerous reflections, suppositions, departures, innovations and so on which are bound together *in relation* with each other that have produced it as a thing.

Nina: It is true that a thing *is* always a relation but if it is to be en-

gaged with at all, the relation must also function as a thing. It is a convention of discourse to compress complex relational processes into moveable objects (called placeholders) in order to organise them in relation with other compressed objects and thus set in motion *other* relations.

Dusty: To facilitate discourse, it is necessary to both compress relations into objects and expand objects into relations. If we visited a relationship counsellor and announced, 'our relation is not working', we would immediately become aware that 'our relation' has become an object to be reflected upon *in relation* with the counsellor.

Nina: By operating the thing that is *wages for housework* as if it were a sort of *camera obscura* which projects movements occurring elsewhere back onto the name it has given itself, James (and Dalla Costa) enact a distinct method of gaining theoretical knowledge which post-situationists used to call *self-theory*. Where the scholar is condemned to speak and write about objects with which they are already familiar, the *theoretician of the self* writes and speaks on that which they are only now finding out. Where the scholar concludes with the act of writing a period of study which has already occurred, the *self-theoretician* thinks through her pencil. In this way, *wages for housework*, which first appears as a 'demand', is transformed by self-theory into a screen upon which the nature of wages, housework and demands are made to appear problematically.

Dusty: Yes, it is something more than the process noted by Hegel where in various kinds of knowledge, *we find that what in former days occupied the energies of men of mature mental ability sinks to the level of information, exercises, and even pastimes, for children.*

Nina: Something more than this, because the progression which Hegel asserts may also be reversed. In this way, the process of linear advancement by which relations are condensed into things which are broken off and inserted into other relations, for other purposes, may be interrupted and considered *otherwise*. The 'pastime' or toy may also be retroactively unlocked to reveal its hidden *afterwardsness* (Freud's *nachträglichkeit*) and the 'energies of men' condensed within it. From a single relic or artefact, an entire culture may be summoned up. Or rather, from within the artefact, one may perceive a world shedding itself, like the wall of a mountain collapsing into the sea.

Dusty: Yes. The signal term, or *toy*, which functions as a mere thing appearing at the end of, or which survives, the long process now submerged into it and to which it is related as a relic, will, when placed under particular consideration, reactivate the terms of that past process and also set in motion another relation in the present. In the case of *wages for housework* which appears as a relic, as a thing, as a demand, we see how it acts as a constraint of appearance on the discourse of the relations which it holds under its sway.

Nina: If we may now return to those marxists who are intent on pulling out the rug from each other's theoretical positions. We can understand that their motivation is to cut off and maroon the statements of the other as a means of establishing and possessing a *real relation* between their own statements and the truths contained in Marx. In particular, let us look at the statement: *capital is not a "thing" or substance, but a social relation of command over living labour.*

Dusty: Of course, as soon as someone says *that is not a thing but a social relation*, it is obvious that the term 'social relation' does not appear in their statement as an actual relation but remains a discursive unit. When one refers to a *relation*, the relation is not immediately present and remains referred to by the discursive *thing*. But perhaps you mean there is a category type error in the appearance of the concept 'living labour' in that context?

Nina: Well, there is a question about whether speaking of something as a thing or a relation is more useful in communicating its place in the world. Is it more conducive to understanding the relatedness and processive quality of things, if a thing is presented as a thing or as a knot of relations? It could easily be argued that the statement, *that thing is a social relation*, is not helpful, when the act of presenting it as such requires that relation must appear as an thing.

Dusty: This indicates an incommensurability in discourse between the registers of the technical schematic on the one side and associative-representational conventions on the other. Where Marx presents capital as a schematic, the multiple internal connections, separate circuits and layers are revealed. Where he presents capital as a 'thing', he supplies powerfully ringing images which may be *autonomously* related to experience by others and thus enable them to express their existence.

Nina: The so-called *living relation* that is invoked by Marx's close readers remains thing-like because it is derived from a schematic adherence to the text. In that sense, 'relatedness' and *relations* definitely tend towards the more *thing-like*. That is to say, they lose the essence of what a relation is. The act of insisting that a relation which appears as a thing really is a relation, tends to enforce its appearance as a thing.

Dusty: A diagram is not a relation. It is the presentation of a relation as if it were a thing.

Nina: We must not go too far against schematisation as a further consideration here is the layer of constraints which shape relations – the relations of relations. It is inadequate to simply refuse to refer to laws, i.e. the objective factors which cause relations to become more or less thinglike.

Dusty: That is something we cannot go into directly. It is perhaps worthwhile to return to Leibniz here on the thing in relation to the relation of which it is a product:

Thus, although each created Monad represents the whole universe, it represents more distinctly the body which specially pertains to it, and of which it is the entelechy; and as this body expresses the whole universe through the connexion of all matter in the plenum, the soul also represents the whole universe in representing this body, which belongs to it in a special way.

Nina: It is possible to know the entire world, the relations and the laws of relations through a heightened engagement with what maybe otherwise dismissed as a *thing*. However, whilst this intuitive knowledge is distinct from that which adheres to schematics, even intuition tends, after its second opening up of the universe from a grain of sand, towards schematising frames of thought – that is as soon as it endeavours to learn about itself.

Dusty: But anyway, there is an internal contradiction isn't there, in the statement, *capital is not a "thing" or substance, but a social relation of command over living labour?* Living labour is also not an object.

Nina: Yes, this is important. There is no such thing as 'living labour', there is a commodity, *labour time* which is bought and sold according

to an already established pattern of domination. Of more concern to us is that there is also a relation between the acts of concrete labour and those souls undertaking it as their means of selling what is subsumed by the productive process as *units of labour time*.

Dusty: The capitalist productive relation constitutes activity as abstract labour time which it integrates into the productive process as a commodity. However, within the marxist schematic this process of extraction also constitutes another relation, i.e. that between those purchasing amounts of labour time and those selling labour power, which for them is actualised in the performance of concrete labour. The relation between buyers and sellers of the 'thing' called labour power is defined in terms of class: the 'commanding' class and the working class. Evidently, there is also some space between commodified labour activity and those undertaking it... this space is a *relation*. It is the relation of the labouring class (constituted as the sellers of labour power) to the character or *thingness* of the activity it is undertaking. Labour is therefore both the mediating object between the capitalist class and working class *and* the 'working class' and its own essence.

Nina: The problem of the nature of this relation between activity (thing *and/or* relation) and essence (thing *and/or* relation) now concerns us because we can imagine the buying and selling of labour, i.e. the autonomic extraction of labour time, without recourse to the conception of a constituted working class. That is to say, we can imagine *work* without reference to the concept of an implied progressive socialisation of production to which the working class are *its* natural inheritors.

Dusty: The class was always passively constituted anyway. The commonality between workers was only ever that they were all selling their labour capacity as units of embodied time within an already constituted system of consumption of that time. We could only ever infer the existence of a potential *for-itself* 'class' behind the mass appearance of the selling of acts of labour as labour time... we have never been able to *point to* the class beyond our interpretation of the inclusion of an input called *living labour* in the productive process.

Nina: As I said, we can imagine the extraction of labour by the productive process without recourse to a commonality, a social body, constituted both by the wage, and against the reduction which the

wage relation imposes. Or, to put it another way, the implied commonality between labourers, that is based on their shared integration into the wage relation, is socially negligible. That is to say, all workers earn a wage but there is no evidence of anything that may be derived from that particular necessity which also constitutes the class at a higher, subjective or political level. It is not because they earn a wage that they become capable of social revolution.

Dusty: Which means that the *relatedness* bound up in the class of those selling labour power (which to them appears as acts of labour) as units of time for a wage is as good as closed down. This relation between activity and essence and essence/activity and organisation, which by definition supposes separation between the terms, might not be a relatedness at all, but appears merely as a *thing*. Perhaps there is no good reason to assume that there is a 'class' behind the labour time input, and therefore humanity must be sought as an essential antagonism to capital elsewhere in social relations.

Nina: Within certain narrative presentations of the schematic presentation, we cannot find the human beings behind the labour, it seems *they have become labour*. Now that all possible human acts are *productive* there is an infinite quantity of work (although not of all of it enclosed within value production.) Humans have become inseparable from their productivity, and their productivity has become fully saturated, I mean inextricable from, the imposed abstract quality of their productive behaviours.

Dusty: And therefore, within that particular narrative presentation of the schematic of real domination, humans have become incapable of anything but labour. The essence of the community of capital is labour. There is no distance between workers and the productive process, no exterior reference point by which they might summon up something other of themselves in contradiction to the wage relation.

Nina: Which brings us to the doubled question of what is not-work and what is affect-work?

Dusty: Which is the problem set as a thing which is not a demand but a frame that James and Dalla Costa have called *wages for housework*. Here, they present the problem in a manner that is problematic for us, and yet also illuminative:

...we must discover forms of struggle which immediately break the whole structure of domestic work, rejecting it absolutely, rejecting our role as housewives and the home as the ghetto of our existence, since the problem is not only to stop doing this work, but to smash the entire role of housewife. The starting point is not how to do housework more efficiently, but how to find a place as protagonist in the struggle, that is, not a higher productivity of domestic labour but a higher subversiveness in the struggle.

Nina: From our reading of this text, we need to reset the problem of the relation between labour and those undertaking it in order that proletarian commonality does not appear schematically as based on the abstract universality of the wage but is derived experientially through the positioning of the proletariat within the productive apparatus.

Dusty: Which is where *wages for housework* converges with our project. *Nihilist Communism's* critique is not directed at 'capitalism' so much as at production through a critique of labour as labour. It emphasises the *place* of workers in the essential production of the world rather than the potential for constituting a positive socialising community out of the wage-earning class. For *Nihilist Communism* there is no continuity between the present capitalist category called the proletariat and future communism, that is to say, it argues there is no step from *labour* to *communism*. It assumes that the essential proletariat is *in relation* to production because of its place within production. That is to say, the *relation* between capital and labour, from the essential proletariat's perspective, is not expressed in the wage relation but in the productive relation. *Nihilist Communism* argues that the essential proletariat is therefore also in position to put an end to that relation.

Nina: Within the *Nihilist Communist* model, the abolition of labour supposes the abolition of production itself through the decommissioning of the factory form.

Dusty: So, the critical 'relation' bound up in the object of 'living labour' as presented by *Nihilist Communism* is not that between employed abstract labour time and an implied but latent *for-itself* class formation but between labour activity and a residual humanity which remains exterior to the productive process. The point, for *Nihilist Communism*, is not the historic socialisation of humanity via the one-

way development of the relations of production but the potential for separation of humanity from labour. The question of the existential *place* of the human being as bearer of labour is the central issue for *Nihilist Communism* just as it is the struggle against the reproduction of the place as a place of labour that must concern the alienated human being. Categorically, there can be no communist factories.

Nina: This emphasis on *tension in place* supposes a purely negative solidarity based on a shared interest in escaping the place of employment. It refuses the possibility of establishing a universal community on the basis of an already present abstract sociality instigated by the relations of production – which is implied by the supposed potential revolutionary solidarity amongst wage earners.

Dusty: This is not to say that all struggles against place and for place are of equal objective worth in the release of capitalist binds, but they are all of equal subjective worth, and must therefore be conducted by those *in place* as the most important project of their lives.

Nina: Which is why the realisation of the principle *ne travaillez jamais* may only be undertaken *in work*, or rather, *in relation* to work. Otherwise it makes no sense. The not-working of the essential proletariat is of most significance in the dissolution of general capitalist productive relations but not-working *everywhere* (in every place) is significant to the development of communist relations.

Dusty: So we are saying, the domestic sphere is also a space of work acts.

Nina: We are saying that capitalist productive relations also appear there, as a diffuse light playing on the solar system's most distant planet. But the commodity form appears there much more persuasively.

Dusty: Then, the in-place struggle of the housewife is against labour type activities as these appear in the domestic sphere and also against the appearance there of the commodity form's mediation of intimacy, as a means of processing relations.

Nina: And more than this. The domestic place is historically transcendent. It ought not be primarily defined as where labour power is reproduced. It is rather the narrow space from where communism,

i.e. non commodified, non-labour-type, activities must first emerge. Communism is not a relation of production, it is the experience of establishing and inhabiting a domestic space for conviviality which, in itself supposes the general suppression of society's domination by production.

Dusty: That is a wild divergence from the conventions of feminist thought. You are suggesting that if the essential proletariat are to suppress production then it is the 'housewife' who will create the 'place' in which communist relations are to flourish.

Nina: Selma James rightly argues for the universal primacy of the status of intimate life and the space where the care which reproduces intimate life is located. It is a natural progression to argue from, to think through, *wages for housework*, and conclude that 'housework', i.e. the domestic sphere, is a universal transcendent place. Clarice Lispector writes of this cosmic burden, 'I'm tired. My tiredness comes often because I'm an extremely busy person: I look after the world. Every day I look from my terrace at a section of beach and sea and see...'

Dusty: I think most feminists and most marxists would prefer it if arse-wiping was not the core gesture in the reproduction of communist relations and yet Lispector defines the gaze of 'looking after' by conflating it with 'looking at'. By means of her fond gaze the world is looked after, just as the children play within the safe space set out by the mother's (perhaps not actively attentive) presence. Even so, I feel we have arrived at a 'solution', too easily... I am reminded of that famous moment in Wenders' *Kings of the Road*:

Kamikaze: There used to be ink that you could erase old writing with and write something new at the same time. I kept thinking and writing down the same thing. Even when I kept waking up from this dream. Abstract repetitions, processes, paths that I experienced and wrote down simultaneously. That means, dreaming was: writing in circles. Until I dreamt up the idea of changing the ink. With this new, dark ink there were suddenly new things I could think and see and write. Everything was solved.

King of the road: No. You are still in the dark.

Nina: Yes, as Zizek has commented, it is a logistical mistake to try

and implement a two-ink solution. Even if one ink erases *and* writes the same thing over and over. Even if the other ink enables the writer to leave all past writing behind. It is a mistake to think we have progressed beyond a problem by changing terms, that we have settled an issue by asserting the transcendence of another place. It is a mistake to try and transmit on two wavelengths.

Dusty: In reality, the domestic place is just our *black box*, it is a structure for examining other claims.

Nina: We have not really left the 'marxists' and 'feminists' behind. The fact of our referring to them is evidence of that. Even so, it is fair to say that the conventions of both marxist and feminist discourses would rather consider care tasks to be an abstractly, socially 'necessary' burden set amongst equivalents, just as capitalist relations have already defined them. In this, we oppose them.

Dusty: Ultimately, they would prefer it if the mechanics of care *were* to be allocated as a banal job which robots will one day take over, so that they themselves can get on with their *higher functions*.

Nina: I think there is in this marxist-feminist dismissal of the domestic sphere, a residue of contempt for women and what they actually do. Again, it is necessary to cite, Lispector, 'with my glance I must look after thousands of plants and trees and especially the giant water lily. It's there. And I look at her.'

Dusty: Most social revolutionaries are driven by a hatred for the subservience they find in others. They present this optimistically as a lack of consciousness (which they will rectify) and as the potential for emancipation from the abject tasks of the other. But this universalism expresses only those traits which they are uncomfortable with in themselves, which they seek to project onto others and thereby redeem as rights and principles.

Dusty: These despised, intimate tasks of reproducing human relations which are called 'care' cannot and must not be treated as *labour*. They constitute and cannot be separated from human relations, that is *care* must be the relations between human beings. The point is not to *assign* intimate tasks but to situate them as the necessary core of the human community.

Nina: There is nothing wrong in being a scientist, a doctor, an architect, a newspaper editor, a web designer, a teacher, a sociologist but it is quite another to *sweep the kitchen floor* – as perhaps only Tarkovsky has envisaged that.

Dusty: And the one sweeping turns to face you.

Nina: And you do not see her face.

Dusty: It is the face of the other.

Nina: It is the face of the other.

Dusty: The other in the other's place.

Nina: Where woman breaks from her status of mere placeholder for *the name of the father*, amongst others. Where right and wrong don't matter.

Nina: And bringing into the world what it is for the human community to be *for itself* in its place. It is as if it were being performed before the lens of Yusov.

Dusty: The woman as moving presence through the space.

Nina: *If seven maids with seven mops/Swept it for half a year.*

Dusty: Yes, it is not as if we could not anticipate the accusations of *reaction*. But the point is not that it is women who *should* undertake therapeutic care tasks *because* this ideologically constitutes the core of communism, nor that there cannot be departures from those tasks. On the contrary, the involvement of all in relations of care is essential... the point here is that women have thus far carried out these core activities of humanity through history and this core has been ignored.

Nina: *We are constrained to always add caveats and reservations until the central thesis is obscured. That is the game of the self-interview... the disappearance of the object of discussion.* There is something reactionary in the housewife role, which must be explored. We are not in the business of venerating saints. This from James and Dalla Costa:

To return then to what we said above: women, housewives, identifying themselves with the home, tend to a compulsive perfection in their work. We all know the saying too well: you can always find work to do in a house.

and

...because of the special brand of stunting of the personality already discussed, the woman becomes a repressive figure, disciplinarian of all the members of the family, ideologically and psychologically.

Dusty: It is true that in certain surviving pre-capitalist cultures, there is a history of over-investment in the 'woman's place' as means of sustaining patriarchal systems. I say 'certain cultures' because where capitalism has passed into a phase of *real domination* over society, the space we are referring to has been abolished. We see evidence of this 'woman's place' whenever we listen politely to yet another exposition on the over-elaborate preparation of rice. There is nothing in particular to be admired in those cultures where women dry, pound and blend their own spices at home... where food preparation takes all day, where the rites of tea must be *just so*. These traditions, these jealously guarded right ways of performing very simple tasks have other motivations than the completion of the tasks themselves which are as pathological as they are defining of a particular place. Such spells and rites are an excrescence, a schematisation of domestic relations that are applied to food, cleanliness, rituals of times of day etc. They are a gall developing within the domestic sphere in response to an otherwise uncomprehended domination. Mother passes on her recipes to the daughter but she also passes on other traditions. Whilst some of these are positive, i.e. the emphasis on the centrality of the *hearth*, others are much less so. The domestic sphere is imposed as the women's place by the women on their daughters but not *for* their daughters and not *for* the women. The domestic sphere in these 'traditional' cultures is resistant to the drive to flexibilisation in labour but it functions subserviently within a set of relations of domination and thus never truly realises intimate relations and nurturing as it should. As James and Dalla Costa put it, 'a power relation precludes any possibility of affection and intimacy.'

Nina: But in many places the territory has changed. The space of intimacy has been hollowed out and destroyed by capitalist relations and

in part, this destruction was rationalised by marxism and feminism. The domestic space now appears quite differently than how James and Dalla Costa presented the situation in 1972. Not only does the representation of capitalist relations ring untrue but the phase of real domination of those relations has been realised precisely through the types of struggle they then advocated.

Dusty: Nobody can be 'blamed' for the unintended consequences and false goals of historical social activism. However, it is now clear to us that within 'social movements' there are hidden codes of commodification, alienation and exploitation which cause such bodies to function precisely as the means of realising ideological forms within the discourse of revolt where it would otherwise be unthinkable. As the discourse of liberation has penetrated deeply into relations of intimacy and care, so it has enabled their colonisation.

Nina: And today, nobody is more *pacified* and *isolated* than those 'occupying' the communal hells that are social centres, or those belonging to some anarcho-syndicalist group or social movement. And you say, nobody can be 'blamed' but the nature of repressive consciousness, as Camatte defines it, is to carry on regardless of casualties and despite the growing body of 'bad experience' literature. After all, *Militancy – Highest Stage of Alienation* was written in 1972 and Camatte's *On Organisation* was written in 1969. Nothing has been learned because 'the struggle' is another means of realising urgently suppressive relations. But it is also important to understand the problem of falsely understanding capitalism – and I am not talking about the value-form nonsense here.

Dusty: Okay, it is true that James and Dalla Costa demonstrate this false understanding in their externalising phrases as they represent of what they are 'up against'. For example,

...robbed of the possibility of developing their creative capacity, they are robbed of their sexual life which has been transformed into a function for reproducing labour power...

It is in the interest of the structures maintained by repressive consciousness to represent capitalist relations as *repressive* as this facilitates the unending power struggles and feuds which are the true purpose of political groupscules, just as they are of religious sects. Capitalism is not a repressive relation, on the contrary, it optimises

all possibilities within the commodity form – it has sought to maximise the production of female sexual creativity in the decades since the appearance of *The power of women and the subversion of the community*. The association of either creativity or desire with 'liberation' in no way engages the exploitative and alienating relations which characterise capitalism... and the discourse of the militant, who persistently seeks confrontation with the repressive Father, cannot articulate capital's tendency towards an exploitative *non-repressive de-sublimation* of desires.

Nina: That is not to say that the following is not a moving representation of the struggle to be human:

To make love and to refuse night work to make love, is in the interest of the class. To explore why it is women and not men who raise the question is to shed new light on the whole history of the class.

Dusty: Yes. Aside from the archaic associations of 'making love' with subversion (which might now be characterised as mere *sex-positivism*), it states clearly the necessity for bringing the woman's discourses of intimacy and care into the centre of ideas about social transformation.

Nina: To care is to be human, but to assign the status of care as a sort of work of low significance, is a signal of inhumanity. The argument we are making through this reading of *wages for housework* as a non-demand is that there is nothing else essential in the human community but caring – that is, caring is the decisive condition for the organisation of the *gemeinwesen*. Caring is relatedness in human society. That is to say, caring is the thing-name of relation *qua* relation. James and Dalla Costa set out the incoherence of the problem in exhilarating phrases:

We also want choices: to eat in privacy with few people when we want, to have time to be with children, to be with old people, with the sick, when and where we choose. To "have time" means to work less. To have time to be with children, the old and the sick does not mean running to pay a quick visit to the garages where you park children or old people or invalids. It means that we, the first to be excluded, are taking the initiative in this struggle so that all those other excluded people, the children, the

old and the ill, can re-appropriate the social wealth; to be reintegrated with us and all of us with men, not as dependants but autonomously, as we women want for ourselves; since their exclusion, like ours, from the directly productive social process, from social existence, has been created by capitalist organisation.

Dusty: They set the problem of the caring place. And that is enough. It is enough for us to enable our departure from the constraints of their presentation. We depart but *without hostility or negation*. The problem of the space and the relations of the space are clearer to us because of the above statement. Without it, we could not have increased the amplitude of variety in our own conclusions. Because of it we gain a theoretical purchase on the idea that for each successive generation of human beings, the domestic place is a defined by a puddingy roundhouse architecture of basic repetitive gestures that is both fleeting and archaic. Arriving in the domestic place, this generation appears where the previous generation departed, but the relations and gestures of care are always the same, and weave the solidifying armature or architecture which is the transcendent ground of the human community.

Nina: It is an atavistic roundhouse made of dung and sticks?

Dusty: It is a honeycomb of cells made of spit and polish.

Nina: Yes, but sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb, as the hexagonal structure is the optimum natural form for realising what Freud called the *reizschutz* (protective shield). The *reizschutz* defends the cohesion of the internal operations of the domestic place by radically filtering the external excitations impacting against it.

Dusty: The honeycomb form is the most energy efficient means for creating a lattice of simple gestural/behavioural/relational nurture-cells within a given space. The regulated ends of the honeycomb cells are also geometrically efficient (trihedral sections of rhombic dodecahedra, with the dihedral angles of all adjacent surfaces measuring 120°). The shape of the cells facilitates the nesting into each other of the honeycomb layers – with the closed end of the lower cell shared by the cell above it.

Nina: The honeycomb of care-relations is more resilient than flexible – the commands of the basic architectural gestures of caring are

sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. It is solidified from very simple basic gestures directed at separate needs. The honeycomb as a whole is affect-porous and each cell is suffused with the vitality of the entire set of relations as these form.

Dusty: It is probably a good idea to talk about resilience versus flexibility here. The bourgeois ideal takes wing in the various representations of adaptation that are derived from the imposed flexibilisation of labour. Flexibility is translated as the infinite historical mutability of man by man... the counter-model which we are presenting is fixed by specific, nonnegotiable, eternal needs which cannot be by-passed. We begin from the assumption that every infant is born into the Stone Age, as Laing argued, and that its needs ought to be met in a reciprocal register. Human need is not malleable (Lispector): 'You will no doubt ask me why I look after the world. It's because I was born charged with the task.'

Nina: Evidently, this presents an alternative model of complexity to that of modification and manipulation of bodies by abstracting force and the continual revolutionising of needs by the accumulating forces of production. Our model suggests that complex forms are arrived at through the addition of primitive part-objects to each other.

Dusty: But no life is produced out of the mere assembling of part-objects. The honeycomb must be broken and the human being let out of it. There must be a traumatic breaking of ties involving the dissolution of the home. Even if the domestic *reizschutz* is defined by its resilience, it still has its breaking point, which also marks the event from which the human being emerges.

Nina: The emergent event is defined by the structure's transfer of its resilience to the human being. Therefore, as the fissility of the *reizschutz* evidently occurs at the edge of its resilience, the plane along which it *actually* cleaves (that is the precise details of the emergence) defines the character of the resultant human being.

Dusty: That is to say, although there is an optimum moment of emergence, which necessarily differs from *reizschutz* to *reizschutz* depending on site specific idiosyncrasies, the general rule seems to be that the later the human being separates from its formational relations, the more successful will be the transfer of resilience from relational structure to human being (from *relations* as thing to *thing* as being).

Nina: There is no distance between the human being's wound of maturity and the traumatised place which she leaves behind. Neither is the metaphor for the other.

Dusty: But the cellular nature of the care-relation, which supposes the enclosed if connected...

Nina: and suffused...

Dusty: and suffused hexagons in which *this* response to *this* need and always ending in the traumatic breaking up of the home and the departure of the emergent human being as the poor wayfaring stranger is, if melancholy, then also self-limiting in its traumatic impact.

Nina: This is illustrated by the brilliant passage in Casteneda's *Journey to Ixtlan* in which "Ixtlan" turns out to be the home (or *reizschutz*) to which the "sorcerer" cannot return even though it holds a continuing melancholic fascination for him. Don Juan's friend Don Genaro can never return to Ixtlan but he is always on the journey there... he is like the wolf prowling at the perimeters of the pack from which he has been excluded by virtue of his growth, his knowledge, his irreducible character formed by separation. Don Genaro's eyes glitter... is it with tears or mischief?

Dusty: And the Casteneda character is panicked at the thought of these places that are no longer *there* and the people who have become ghostlike and unreachable. He asks 'But its still there isn't it? Ixtlan is still there?' And Don Juan and Don Genaro look sad and say, 'sure.' And then they reel off a list of other towns that are also 'still there'. The list gets longer and more absurd and then they start laughing. They are mocking Casteneda for his tendency to maudlin nostalgia and unprocessed past attachments.

Nina: They find absurdity in their own melancholy. They are separated but they are also resilient.

Dusty: In relation to its *place*, which it must leave for ever, the human being is always in a state of liminality. This is true with other animals – last year's offspring remain within the circle of the mother and her new brood, but they are held by a violent tension... they know she will kill them if they regress to an earlier state.

Nina: When the relation of care is so distinctly located physically and temporally, some of its internal structure can be fixed.

Dusty: We can put numbers and dimensions to it. *We can know how it must be.* For example, the child remains a baby for the first 3 or 4 years of life; the child remains within the mother's boundaries for the first five years of life as a breast feeding dependent; the child is incapable of any decision at all before 7 years old; it is not capable of passing from the most basic of childish awareness before the age of 10.

Nina: And we the drink the tea that is made of bark.

Dusty: And our herbal abortifacients.

Nina: And our tendency to synchronise our menstrual cycles.

Dusty: And our unverified *healing practices*.

Nina: And isn't the removal of the human being from the place of care like the movement called *repulse the monkey*?

Dusty: And the materialists are anxious that Ixtlan should still be there.

Nina: But we *are* materialists *and* it won't be there. Our marxist friends and those who have joined them in their representation of the 'class struggle' are in reality struggling with the problem of, shall we say the constraints of their perspective, if that is not too neo-kantian?

Dusty: I think it is. Shall we say instead that their problem is set like three stones in a line: *distance, attachment, separation*?

Nina: Yes, they are struggling with the traumatic proximity between themselves and their Ixtlanic object. In this, they resemble the baking, stately home dwelling, sometime capitalist, failed composer, self-harming and suicidal uncle in Handke's script for *Wrong Move*. Uncle has a dream:

I dreamt I lay on the bed in my room seeing the wall with the door the whole time. I kept waking up and really seeing the

wall with the door in front of me. I fell asleep and dreamed of it again almost exactly the way I'd really seen it. Except it was closer to me. I had to vomit.

Dusty: That is the most powerful critique of the proposed synthesis of class struggle, value form and communisation discourses that I have ever heard.

Nina: Ostensibly, the experiential basis of *Nihilist Communism* was the time the authors spent as postmen. However, it is not much commented on that they had both left the job at the time of writing and independently both had become 'housewives'. Thus, *Nihilist Communism* can be understood as a personal separation of involvement in political discourse whilst re-prioritising personal life, and in particular, childcare.

Dusty: The essence of change involves a relinquishment of fixations. That is to say, *one tries and one tries and then one must walk away*. This is not to suggest a policy of acceptance or *offering the other cheek*, but rather that which has come after *Nihilist Communism* insists on examining the dependent relation of those who seek change upon the object of their attention (Lispector and pathology): 'With my eyes I look after the misery of the people who live on the hillsides'

Nina: I think it is valid to read *Nihilist Communism* as an exercise in *having your cake and eating it*.

Dusty: Its unique argument is that the personal scale is of central importance to the person but that no particular extrapolations can be made from personal life to the social scale... the nature of personal life is, to very much the greater degree, is settled by the categorically higher forces of 'class struggle'.

Nina: The way you presented that, suggests that you have some reservations...

Dusty: Not reservations as such. I think I would just add a proviso to the established understanding that *Nihilist Communism* is somehow directly extracted from 'class struggle'. I think the development of the specifics of the theory it advances is much more complicated than the idea that the theory emerges after the accumulation of so many units of experience. I would think it is more fair to say that

the theory emerges first, who knows how, in a speculative form and is then *confirmed* in the experience. Similarly, in scientific practice, 'experiment' is actually only the 'demonstration' of a hypothesis that has been thought up by other means... very often experiments are modified until they confirm the hypothesis (with the resultant theory being disproved by later, other experiments designed specifically to do so).

Nina: Ok. But it is worth noting that *Nihilist Communism* was written specifically in a personal context of disengagement with 'pro-revolutionary' politics and thus marks a full involvement within the domestic sphere.

Dusty: There is a question here which we must address. Why is it that that housewives have not arrived at the transcendent ground of the relations of care via their experience of actual relations of care?

Nina: The question concerns the integration of specific care tasks into the idea of communism. That is of the mundane and the, shall we say, *sublime*. Firstly, I think that housewives do not make this leap subjectively because their efforts are not valorised externally, and it is difficult to establish paths of self-theory. Secondly, I think because the value to humanity of their contribution is not culturally celebrated, there is a strong subjective association of uncertainty leading to guilt and neurosis concerning status, and this feeds into the sense of marginalisation. Thirdly, because it is not clearly delineated as an activity, as a purpose, as a relation, as a place, the materiality of the housewife's work tends to both disperse before analysis and also drift like a mist to cover almost all aspects of life. It seems both irrelevant and indispensable.

Dusty: What would change this?

Nina: In order to clearly establish the housewife's role as an eternal if seasonal undertaking, it must be experienced as something that definitely comes to an end.

Dusty: Yes, the housewife must also establish for herself a position in which she feels confident enough that she is able to walk away from when she feels her role is complete. I think this completion of relations, the deliberate breaking up of the home, exceeds

James and Dalla Costa's idea of simple *non-attendance*.

Nina: Okay. I also feel we have not got to the heart of this.

Dusty: But then, it is so difficult to talk about ways of being that is not defined by work and to set out the importance of relations and activities without recourse to the language of production, utility, instrumentalisation.

Nina: At least we have set out some of the boundaries. To move on, I want to discuss the compatibility of the personal life as presented in *Nihilist Communism* with 'pro-revolutionary' theory.

Dusty: The compatibility is based on an absolute disjunction. The problem between the interest of 'lifestyle' and general social organisation is thus settled by a strict border that is porous in only one direction. It is a solution similar to that in Gould's theory of Non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA) or indeed the general principle that may be derived from, *render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's*.

Nina: I agree, and part of the reason for this discussion is to demonstrate how the personal life is possible on its own terms and for its own sake in relation to the ideas put forward in *Nihilist Communism* in contrast to other 'communist' formulae which place personal life at the service of the 'cause' and thereby relegates its importance on its own terms. Most communist practice is motivated by an urge for moral coherence between the social and the personal (with the latter inexplicably and unacceptably projecting onto the former). By arguing that there is no connection between the 'personal' and the 'political', the authors of *Nihilist Communism* implicitly make the argument that the *personal* is central to the person.

Dusty: I see we are coming to that necessary *meta* chapter of the discussion. I think we are fictional characters conducting a fictional debate at the edge of what we and others understand. Nothing that is advanced here is *real*, that is to say, no arguments presented here are the arguments of real people... but *our* fictional opinions may be considered to be exploratory, fantasised extensions of certain established logics of real people in the real world.

Nina: The wider goal of this discussion has been to show the non-

conflictual relation between non-communist personal arrangements and communist theory. There is no necessity for the person to engage in 'communitising' or 'organising' acts in their personal life as this has no bearing on the objective organisation of society. We are advancing a range of possible ideas here that are in *wages for housework* as a non-demand, and which take intimate relations on its own scale as an end in itself... and we can see that this does not contradict the objectivising ideas in *Nihilist Communism*. It does not contradict them because assertions concerning domestic existence belong to an altogether different *magnitude* than the object of society-wide communist organisation.

Dusty: Again, I do not disagree. We have set forward our ideas but they could have been other ideas and still would have mapped into the *Nihilist Communist* NOMA. However, I would add another proviso here as well. Although it is true that one cannot make moral recommendations for the domestic place *under present conditions*... it seems to me that within what we may call communist social relations certain ways of doing things in personal life will be imposed. Where there is no work; where the child's interest as child is foremost; where those undertaking nurturing tasks are *actualising* direct relations *qua* relations; where divergences from relations of care are set at a specific moment; where the home is dissolved at a specific moment; where the human being emerges from the relation/place of nurturing at a specific moment... it is there that 'communist' organisation appears in personal life, *and that will be burdensome to some people and therefore will have to be imposed by the community upon its smaller units in the interest of the future emergent human and the community as a whole*.

Nina: I see what you are saying, basically that there could be understood a *laissez-faire* attitude within *Nihilist Communism* concerning different behaviours under capitalist conditions (because they are irrelevant) but that this will change within communism where certain hexagonal norms will be imposed on personal life. However, whilst the boundary between the personal and political is porous within capitalism in one direction, in communism it is porous in both directions. Therefore, experiments in personal behaviour which feed back into already established communist relations will have to either integrate (i.e. contribute) or at least not cause disruption.

Dusty: My point is that we can already see certain attributes of what

is necessary in human life, which we have argued for, however imperfectly... and this brings us back to *wages for housework* as a non-demand. We have been making arguments for these necessities that are situated at the core of the domestic relations which communism will elevate to the transcendent ground of communist society's reproduction of human beings for themselves. If there is no work, if a human being is to exist as an end in itself, then the relations of care will have a definite characterisitc.

Nina: I wonder if that is premature. I am not sure we can assert that... or rather, even if we can be certain that a child should be understood as a baby until the age of 4, we cannot be certain how communist society will 'impose' this certainty as a relation of care. Or rather, it seems likely that the relation you define as 'impose' will be superseded by another relation between the general and the particular, in which suggestion, correction, relaxation are more conducive to the stated purpose.

Dusty: (laughing) I think I have my tribal head-dress on today, *it is sharp jabbing spears all the way with me.*

Nina: Oh Dusty, you are awful. But I like you.

Dusty: One of the problems of the dialogic form of discourse is that we are drawn constantly away from the points we wish to make. I think we have covered some of what *Nihilist Communism* 'enables' in the social sphere by the simple act of suspending the role of the pro-revolutionary consciousness. However, I want to go back to the housewife issue. Isn't it the case that although 'dupontist' ideas were generated both *in relation* to factory production and the history of pro-revolutionary theory... the departures established by these ideas only became possible because of the radical re-prioritising of life-goals of their authors?

Nina: You mean that in the act of *becoming housewives* (and here, I cannot help but picture dear Freddie in the video for *I want to break free*) they were able to reveal the masculinist coding that runs through the history of pro-revolutionary goals?

Dusty: I think that is important but if we go back to James and Dalla Costa where they evoke the 'isolation' and 'passivity' of the housewife which they say must be 'smashed' we see a movement by the

figure of *Monsieur Dupont* in quite the opposite direction. MD's project has taken certain existing motifs within ultra-leftism (as previously expressed by Moss, Camatte, Mattick snr, *Négation*, *Echanges et Mouvement* and so on) in the most extreme of its iterations, and presented them at the very edge of the dispersal of the discourse of ultra-leftism.

Nina: Okay. In the act of 'becoming housewives' in real life, they were suddenly able to consider communism in a context conditioned by 'isolation' and 'passivity'. And by withdrawing from the milieu, they were able to enact a self-theorising therapeutic *relinquishment of certain fixations*. It is plausible. But anyway that has always been the hostile critique of *Nihilist Communism*.

Dusty: James and Dalla Costa present *isolation* and *passivity* as fetters to be 'smashed' as they put it, in order to realise different ways of relating 'in struggle' – but we now know that the demands of feminism for new relations between human beings have been realised by capitalism and that the home as separate sphere has effectively been objectively 'smashed' by productive relations. The home has lost its economic and thus social significance in the reproduction of capital because that which was once the home has been fully integrated by communications technology.

Nina: It is true that women have had their relations *socialised* via communications technology, and that the 'family' as distinct economic *dispositif* is disintegrating, and that caring relations are both outsourced and relegated, *and* that the entire workforce has been 'feminised'.

Dusty: In this context therefore it is not surprising that the most radical forms of ultra-leftism should be generated out of a direct experience of the practices of care and intimacy, and that this should be theoretically constituted as a *relinquishment of ultra-leftism*. It is from the ruins of the 'home' that capitalism is now unexpectedly antagonised because we are now presented with the collapse of intimacy which otherwise had been preserved beyond the boundary of capitalist reproduction. The inclusion and abolition of intimacy has presented the last remnants of the ultra-left with a fundamental social contradiction: the relations of production set against the relations of care. It is only from a position that is characterised by its 'isolation' and 'passivity' *vis-à-vis* the productive process that capitalist relations

may now be criticised.

Nina: Why?

Dusty: Because both capitalism and pro-revolutionary activity attack the categories of *passivity* and *isolation*... these are precisely the categories, the categories represented as *woman* (as presented as existing beneath the threshold of 'struggle'), and of the *housewife*, and of the *place and relations of care* which are no longer *valorised* as significant. Only in the peace and space created in the act of relinquishing the general exigent principle of *activity* are the possibilities that may be created by *doing nothing*, revealed. *Nihilist Communism* enacts a very primitive, if effective, *repression* of the category of activity. It forbids its readers the temptation to introject objective significance into their lives. That is to say, it asserts that we are all personally irrelevant to world process, and recognising this frees us and from burdens that do not belong to us. It sets out the possibility for an other scale, and an other pace.

Nina: In the many situations where a terrible wretchedness defines existence, it is the case that we simply cannot liberate ourselves. The means are not there. But *relinquishment* is an unacceptable response.

Dusty: I agree. The threshold of struggle for life and the nature of that struggle are set at different levels for different circumstances in the world. Where there is starvation, there must be violence... not as a 'policy' but simply as a necessity to establish a viable social relation – the route out of starvation and imbalance is characterised by cycles of expropriation and counter-expropriation. We understand that capitalism is established as a social relation wherever the proletariat has expropriated the right of survival but functions as an integrated component in the reproduction of its own alienation.

Nina: So, the situation described by *Nihilist Communism* refers only to those places in the world where the proletariat is reproduced as a constituent of a stable productive process – i.e. where *survival sickness* reigns. *Nihilist Communism* therefore proposes the possibility of an expropriation of relations that is also an act of self-abolition... that is to say, it argues for the relinquishment of the proletarian form. This grand gesture of castration opens another terrain where persons no longer call upon the objective to ratify their personal activities.

Dusty: The absence of objective authority in the text *Nihilist Communism* acts something like a Virgil who refuses to supply directions to those wayfaring strangers who happen to pass across this other terrain. It is a guidebook which does not guide. It allows for *all* activities which make no claim of direct access to the transcendent. In *Nihilist Communism*, everyone may change but nobody may change the world.

Nina: Minimising activity as a goal of life is... that is to say, proposing *doing nothing* as the most radical engagement open to us is a tantalising prospect... just walking away from the ruins. It is a dazzling, if ballardian image. Apparently, we would be left free to poetically sweep with 'the same broom the same few square feet of kitchen for centuries.' And yet, can it really be? I understand that we are talking here about applying the principle of 'doing nothing' only in a particular sphere of social reproduction, that is to say, not adding anything to the conventions of useful activity. And yet, *can it really be*, anti-production as a way of life?

Dusty: I acknowledge that it is a challenging proposal at all levels, practically, theoretically, ethically. And I do not expect that most readers of this will be very responsive to it. Most of them will be middle class, they will want to establish some sort of career where their radical thoughts will be institutionally recognised and rewarded. The multiple withdrawals of *Nihilist Communism* from this sort of involvement must appear very disheartening and uninspiring. *Abandon the streets*, is not a very exhilarating slogan. However, acts of withdrawal are worthwhile to the extent that the ebbing of involvement reveals, in a spectral light, actual social relations as a pathological *reizschutz*.

Nina: What are the sensitive areas that this great *protective shield*, is protecting?

Dusty: We must guess the deep institutional codes which run the various organs together. The links and circuits of compatibilisation, the unseasonal growths and natural deposits, the innovations and traditions, 'the smooth and striated', the abstract and concrete, those forces and their objects which all compress into the 'crystal', as Benjamin says, from the 'total event'.

Nina: And when this compression process is shown to be a defended

space?

Dusty: That is, when it is illuminated as a protected arrangement. We are able to set other relations in relation to it.

Nina: Such as, sweeping the same few feet of kitchen floor.

Dusty: Such as sweeping the same floor. All gestures are assigned their specific significances by the relations into which they are embedded. I think the deciding factor is always the nature of the relations in which such activities are undertaken... if one is sweeping poetically, that necessarily assumes a level of 'transcendence of autonomy' as James and Dalla Costa put it.

Nina: So, in other words, if sweeping the floor is a way into realising transcendence then some other event of relaxation has occurred in higher category social relations in order to enable this. In summation of this discussion, all this amounts to, is that the degree of realisation of the human community may be measured by the appearance of the relations of care undertaken for their own sake.



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