

The Domestic Sphere

Leopoldina Fortunati



Jeff Wall, *A View from an Apartment*, 2004-5. © Jeff Wall.

Since the feminist wave of the 1970s, it is the domestic sphere that has implemented the most radical political and social changes. These changes were somehow anticipated by the book *The Arcane of Reproduction* (1995, first published in Italy in 1981).⁰¹ Forty years later, this book still has much to say to help us understand the current situation of women, children, the elderly, and everyone else. It is not easy to interpret the present: social change has occurred at a faster pace than our ability to innovate the theoretical and methodological toolbox we had at our disposal. Not even Marxist literature has been able to interpret the political significance of this change in all its articulations. However, let's try to identify some key points.

1. WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE PROFOUNDLY CHANGED POLITICS IN RECENT DECADES

From their way of thinking to discourse, from the mood of militancy to attitudes toward organization, from expectations to political behaviors, there has been deep innovation. By the late 1970s, in particular, women transitioned from focusing on everything that did not work in their situation and living conditions, from feeling like victims, to recognizing their responsibilities and becoming aware of the immense power they held in their hands. This was thanks to the women of the younger generations. If we continue to focus only on how bad capitalism is and blame everything on capitalism, we fail to understand both our potential and the capital within each of us. Women realized that they needed to shift from a disempowering, reactive, and negative attitude—typical of any political militant

01 Leopoldina Fortunati, *L'Arcano della riproduzione. Casalinghe, prostitute, operai e capitale* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1981).

of traditional parties and movements, and producing sadness and discouragement—to an empowering, proactive, and positive one.

Besides changing their mental attitude, women and young people have continued to build a political action corresponding to their needs and desires. Not reactively, responding blow for blow to capitalist attacks, but proactively. This has involved the construction of a political structure, political tools, and a political style that does not correspond to the theory of reflection. If capital builds the factory with an owner and a precise hierarchy, the antagonistic organization that fights it tends to be shaped in its image and likeness: the party structure indeed has a precise hierarchy, with its leaders, with a party leader. Women and young people, however, not comfortable with hierarchies but preferring fluidity and networks, have not built parties, but movements and spontaneous initiatives. They have not expressed leaders, but have pursued widespread authority. They have not chased capitalist initiatives, but have taken the path they deemed most effective autonomously.

Of course, women and young people have also changed the topics and metaphors of political discourse, which have become linked to care, well-being, nutrition, protection, and sharing, while traditional political discourse has always mimicked a small war. It is full of enemies and adversaries, battlefields, blame that is always and exclusively put on others (the enemies); it relies on manipulation and seduction, especially in social media, and develops hatred, aggression, and insults. Us against them. In reality, this way of talking about politics is not far from the style and approach of capital.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

It is also in the interest of men to support and stand alongside women in their mobilizations. Let's look together at the current situation of the reproductive sphere. The feminist wave of the 1960s and 1970s helped women of my generation and the following ones to gain more power in the family and in society; this meant more civil rights not only for women but also for men, a stronger sense of citizenship, greater ability to move in space, even alone, and especially in old, industrialized countries.

It is important, however, that everyone, women and men, realize that if the knot of the reproductive sphere and the condition of women is not untied—in terms of recognizing the value produced here economically, normatively, and culturally—this sphere will continue to function as a thorn in the side of all workers, in a perverse race to the bottom. Until the 1980s, the driving force behind political, organizational, and technological initiatives in society was the sphere of commodity production, understood not only as goods but increasingly as services. From here, processes and behaviors then passed into the sphere of social reproduction, which had the task of functioning and producing dependently and in support. The mechanism was that of dripping initiatives, practices, and goods, which passed from production to the sphere of reproduction. This mechanism has been completely reversed, at least in highly industrialized countries, because now the sphere of reproduction has become the model that is exported throughout the entire system. The fundamental characteristics of domestic and care work, such as gratuitousness, precariousness, poor regulation, and the absence of collective bargaining by unions and parties, have also been exported to the sphere of production, where they have become less abnormal than in the past. Here, what were considered secondary or peripheral forms of social regulation, tolerated up to that point only in the sphere of reproduction, have entered into competition with more unionized forms of social contract.

The younger generations have paid the highest price in terms of precarious or undeclared work, more or less forced emigration, lack of economic autonomy from parents, impossibility, in these conditions, of living with one's partner,

of eventually having children, of looking to the future with optimism. From what has been said, everyone, women and men, should demand great respect and recognition for women's work because this is directly in everyone's interest.

However, not only weakness has been exported, but also, implicitly, power negotiation processes, which have developed within families between men and women and among different generations. For example, the stances taken by children and adolescents in their struggles against parental authoritarianism that have developed within families have inevitably reshaped the way new generations of workers, technicians, and employees have demanded to be treated in the workplace.⁰² The more authoritarian behavior of parents has diminished in the family, the more new workers have sought to be treated differently in the workplace. Today, supervisors very often ask workers to perform a task with phrases like, "Could you please do this?"

3. THE DOMESTIC SPHERE: FROM A PLACE OF POLITICAL BACKWARDNESS TO THE HEART OF THE MOST RADICAL INITIATIVES

Personal and social reproduction has completely changed the identity of the domestic sphere: from being considered by traditional political organizations as a place of political backwardness, it has become the beating heart at the social and political level of the entire capitalist system. Personal and social reproduction emerges as an immense laboratory of social and political experiments, dangers, dreams, initiatives, and visions. The reproductive sphere is where the most relevant political and social movements have developed in recent decades, such as the Arab Spring, the *Indignados* Movement in Spain, and Occupy Wall Street in the United States, and the most important collective actions, such as the Urban Knitting initiatives,⁰³ the *Se non ora quando* Movement, the MeToo Movement, the recent women's strike in Switzerland, and the movements of boys and young people for the defense of nature, land, and the climate. Social and individual reproduction is now the sphere in which the future is woven, discussed, elaborated in the long term, and in a real, sustainable way. In old, industrialized countries, women, men, children, young people, adults, and the elderly are experiencing many different forms of gender, in order to address their paths of autonomy and self-determination. The old division of gendered labor and the resulting differences between men and women, based on the correspondence between women and prevalent feminine traits, as well as between men and prevalent masculine traits, have been impacted by many social and political changes.

As a consequence, a new division of gendered labor has taken hold: women have learned to engage with masculine culture—based on *logos*, i.e., rational thought—and men have learned to manage feminine culture based on *metis*, i.e., empathy, and intuition (I will get back to that later). Women are currently more engaged in education than men, where they achieve excellent grades and higher education. This means that women have learned to manage the logos. On the other hand, men are experiencing a closer relationship with intimacy, affections, and emotions, and consequently also with their bodies. Men have begun to invest energy in taking care of their bodies, shaving, adorning themselves with necklaces, earrings, and bracelets, staying fit with diets and physical exercise, and dressing their bodies with much more care than in the past. In short, women have become more 'masculine' and men more 'feminine,' although the media apparatus, ad-

02 Leopoldina Fortunati, Sakari Taipale, and Federico de Luca, "Digital Generations, But Not As We Know Them," *Convergence* 1 no. 25 (February 2019): 95–112.

03 Manuela Farinosi and Leopoldina Fortunati, "A New Fashion: Dressing the Cities Up, Textile," *The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 11, no. 3 (2013): 282–99.

vertising, and educational inertia still generally convey a rigid and traditional segregation of male and female images, figures, and roles.

Other old structures of society, such as the family structure, have lost their uniqueness. Under the initiative and determination of especially women and young people, people today are experiencing many forms of family or live and remain alone. The family, based on a couple with children, has been supplemented by other types of families, such as those composed of childless couples, single individuals, single-parent families, mixed families, and blended families in which members belonging to different families live. The rigid discipline and normativity that in the past regulated the family as the basic cell of society have become more flexible and diversified. In this context, even friendships or the way we maintain relationships with relatives, the regulation of social distance from others in general, have changed and diversified, thanks also to the availability and spread of new media and their usage practices.

Behaviors, linked to private and public dimensions, and social practices related to information and communication, and, in general, attitudes toward social change, have highlighted many forms of resistance and mass grassroots initiatives. At the political level, the regulation of social distances between different classes has been completely renegotiated: fear of the ruling classes and subtle forms of social distinction that were a powerful tool to maintain the power structure in society have weakened. Today, women and men from various social classes make their way through the streets, having gained greater degrees of social, economic, and cultural equality than in the past.

At first glance, all these fronts may describe the phenomenology of a fluid society, but in reality, they tell us how domestic work and family and interpersonal relationships are transforming both materially and immaterially. The fact that social relationships, rituals, and practices of social life have changed means that immaterial and material domestic work has been subjected to an intense wave of negotiation between women and men, as well as between generations, and an intense wave of mass behaviors, otherwise called “political initiatives with a lowercase letter.” There is no peace in the reproductive sphere, as an unequal division of domestic and care work between men and women continues to persist, albeit in a more attenuated form than in the past.

At the same time, various tasks of domestic work have been externalized: many people eat in restaurants or canteens or bars, send clothes to dry cleaners, etc.; and other tasks intersect with new ways of conceptualizing household chores. Sexuality has also been partially dematerialized (online pornography) and partially externalized in the world of lovers, casual encounters, and prostitution. Women (but also increasingly men) continue to engage in prostitution work, which is indeed paid (more or less well), but at the cost of indelible social contempt. Even today, when someone wants to offend someone, they resort to derogatory terms historically directed at prostitutes.

Other tasks intersect with new ways of conceptualizing household chores. Enormous processes of simplification, standardization, and automation within the home, as well as the outsourcing of domestic tasks, involve other tasks, both at the material and immaterial levels: education, emotions, entertainment, communication, and information. The kitchen, in particular, besides being partially outsourced, shows the tendency to transform in different directions: from the significant decrease in home cooking to the conquest of new visibility in many television programs. Cooking is no longer an invisible task performed at home by women or other family members, but is becoming an activity in which new and old skills are combined in an unprecedented scenario of representation and information.

The centrality of the domestic sphere is also evidenced by the fact that both the state and families must dedicate increasingly large investments to supplement domestic work that is no longer carried out by women within families, also due to their growing presence in the labor market. On the

one hand, the state must allocate the majority of its budget to integrate the levels of social reproduction of the workforce in terms of education, health, and retirement. On the other, families are obliged to draw on migrant women for a considerable amount of domestic and care work for the care of children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled. Alternatively, they resort to domestic robots, as shown by the 2012 Eurobarometer survey.⁰⁴

4. THE DOMESTIC SPHERE BETWEEN SCIENCE OF THE CONCRETE, METIS, AND AFFECTIONS

What makes the domestic sphere particularly suitable for cultivating social change is that a particular combination of forces is at work here: 1) the Science of the Concrete, 2) Metis, and 3) Affections, which enhance both previous forces.⁰⁵ Let's examine these forces one by one. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, in the past, the science of the concrete expressed an extraordinary capacity to structure its thought by systematically labeling and classifying the surrounding world through perceptions and emotions.⁰⁶ This work led to organizing a system of thought that recognized the law of cause and effect and the possibilities and opportunities to combine, recombine, and remedy things. The organization of thoughts resulting from this systematic work has been able to generate active and methodical observations and controls, hypotheses to be discarded or validated, explanations, new questions, ideas, and new concepts, and finally myths.

The science of the concrete has led to extraordinary inventions, such as ceramics, weaving, agriculture, wise and widespread use of herbs and minerals, knowledge of medicine, and the domestication of animals. Lévi-Strauss speaks of the Neolithic paradox, arguing that all these innovations would not have been possible without a very effective and powerful science.⁰⁷ Lewis Mumford also speaks of the quality of these innovations, defining them as biotechnologies or democratic life technologies, exalting life.⁰⁸ By contrast, Mumford emphasizes, the technologies produced by the science of the abstract—that is, by engineers, information scientists, etc.—are technologies that deny life.

The other force operating in the reproductive sphere is metis. It is a particular form of feminine intelligence and concerns a specific way of thinking, cultivated especially by women, based on empathy and intuition.⁰⁹ It is a form of prudence and cunning intelligence, which refers to the intellectual capacity to overcome obstacles by circumventing them. The ancient Greeks associated it with Metis, daughter of the Titan Oceanus and Tethys, who was Zeus's wife but whom he swallowed when she was pregnant with Athena. Metis's intellectual strength serves to explain a resource and a capacity that was present or cultivable, as a distinctive feature, also in some of the male heroes like Odysseus, but which is still present or cultivable in all of us. Metis represents a non-virile force, as it has the strength of water rather than of iron, of pervasiveness rather than penetration, of tenacity and patience rather than bullying. Women (but also men) who possess this force of mind are protected from a series of errors. They are attentive to communication strategies and filter what to say and what to listen to. Moreover, they know how not to reveal themselves and when to come out: in other words, they understand the importance

04 Leopoldina Fortunati, Federico de Luca, Mauro Sarrica, and Sakari Taipale, "Europeans' Perception of Robots: Implications for Social Policies," in *Social Robots from a Human Perspective*, ed. Jane Vincent, Sakari Taipale, Bartolomeo Sapio, Leopoldina Fortunati, and Giuseppe Lugano (Berlin: Springer, 2015), 11–24.

05 Leopoldina Fortunati and Jane Vincent, "Introduction," in *Electronic Emotion: The Mediation of Emotion via Information and Communication Technologies*, ed. Jane Vincent and Leopoldina Fortunati (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009): 1–31.

06 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966).

07 Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*.

08 Lewis Mumford, "Technics and the Nature of Man," *Technology and Culture* 7 (1996): 310–11.

09 Matteo Nucci, *Le lacrime degli eroi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2013).

of representation, which allows them to decide what to hide and what, instead, to show, in order to make their message truly impactful. It is on the management of metis that women have been able to build a psychic power stronger than that of men.

The third force is the ability, experience, and competence in dealing with and managing emotions, affections, and passions as a fundamental part of caregiving work. In the field of reproduction, women have learned over time to develop a particular sensitivity towards the emotional well-being of individuals and its collective impact on the emotional heart of society.

Adam Smith understood that emotion is the glue that holds the fabric of society together.¹⁰ In fact, no social or political science could function without addressing the reasons of the heart, of which reason, according to the famous quote by Blaise Pascal, knows nothing.¹¹ If social interactions are a blend of emotion and reason, then communication should be considered the same way. “Words, most commonly used for interaction, are both part of emotion and part of reason, and this means that we can speak not only of the emotional intelligence,”¹² but also of “emotional communication.”¹³ As women show every day, emotions function as energy multipliers.

A separate discussion must be held about technology because digital technologies, compared to traditional ones, are paradoxically more in tune with the three forces at work in the productive sphere. Women currently own and use many technologies: the network of personal technologies and household appliances, but perhaps these are not exactly the ones that women need and would like to have. According to Turkle,¹⁴ the mindset characterizing the digital era is similar to what anthropologist Lévi-Strauss defined as “the savage mind” or “the Science of the Concrete.”¹⁵ Another characteristic of the digital era is playfulness. As Valerie Frissen argues, “digital technologies are not only playful technologies but also the results of playful practices.” She continues: “Playing with technologies has always been a driving factor behind technological transformation.”¹⁶ Exciting innovations, Frissen argues, emerge more frequently from networks of amateur experimenters¹⁷ or from pro-ams (professional amateurs) (e.g., Linux, Arduino, P2P technology).¹⁸ Frissen further states that digital technologies are a way of tinkering intellectually, and although they are not primarily oriented toward innovation, paradoxically the primitive, wild, and playful way of thinking by producers has led to many radical innovations. Another characteristic of digital technologies is their potential for free sharing, which has a decidedly anti-capitalist flavor. A final important characteristic is their permeability to affections, as we will see in the following point.

In short, the sphere of reproduction has proven to be particularly suitable for fueling social change because it combines three very powerful forces: the Science of the Concrete, Metis, and Affections.

10 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Scotland, 1759).

11 Marvin R. O’Connell, *Blaise Pascal: Reasons of the Heart* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdams, 1997).

12 Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, “Emotional Intelligence,” *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 3, no. 9 (March 1990): 185–211. See also Daniel P. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

13 ¹² Fortunati and Vincent, “Introduction,” 1.

14 Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995)

15 Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*.

16 Valerie Frissen, “Playing with Bits and Bytes: The Savage Mind in the Digital Age,” in *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*, ed. Valerie Frissen, Sybille Lammes, Michiel de Lange, Jos de Mul, and Joost Raessens (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 149.

17 Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller, *The Pro-Am Revolution: How Enthusiasts Are Changing Our Society and Economy* (Demos, 2004). See also Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2008).

18 Eric von Hippel, *Democratizing Innovation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

5. THE MOVEMENT OF THE CONCRETE

In the laboratory of experimentation and movements that is the reproductive sphere today, I would like to focus on a paradigmatic movement that helps us understand the potential of this sphere. This movement is what I call the 'Movement of the Concrete', which is ushering in a new phase in the evolution of humanity. It has a broad social composition and consists of women carrying with them feminist and post-feminist experiences, caregivers and women, as well as men who are artisans, producers, designers, Fab Lab and maker enthusiasts, activists, new and old farmers, ecologists, NGOs, volunteers, and all those who want to build a new world, immediately, without waiting for the fall of the capitalist system or focusing solely on how to destroy it.

This large movement aspires to introduce playfulness and to exercise counter-production, counter-consumption, and counter-reproduction, right now, not later. Its political program is to liberate oneself and others, starting by freeing labor from its mandatory sale in the labor market and from its discipline, control, and global exploitation by the capitalist regime. The strategy pursued by the activists of the Movement of the Concrete has incorporated and metabolized the politically residual figures of the bricoleur and the volunteer, transforming them into politically alternative and powerful figures. The first, crucial place of emancipation from the capitalist process has changed: it is now the home, but a home (and land) inhabited by women and men, young people, children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled, all considered political subjects.

The Movement of the Concrete has incorporated emotions, passions, and affections into its development and political culture. Once again, it is from the politically 'residual' figure of the amateur, the volunteer, and the homemaker that the activists of the Movement of the Concrete have reclaimed the role of emotions, self-expression, and creativity in their work and in what they produce. Notably, amateurs were traditionally called 'dilettantes,' indicating how these individuals were and are driven by passion, and therefore pleasure and playfulness were and are motivating dimensions of their work. The place where amateurs traditionally worked was the home or the garage, transformed into a small personal workshop.

Another socially driven figure by emotion is that of the volunteer. In this case, the driving force is compassion and the willingness to offer help to others, but those who volunteer also experience pleasure in caring for those who are ill or in need of assistance. Naturally, the figures of the amateur and volunteer have a close relationship with the figure of the wife-mother-homemaker, whose work has been constructed as a labor of love and affection. Domestic work has always been motivated by feelings and emotions and has always represented the emotional and psychological management of affections, caring, protecting, nurturing, and offering comfort and support to all family members. Alienation in this type of work has been caused by the commodification of emotions and affections, by the lack of recognition of the value of such work and, consequently, by the lack of social respect that has always surrounded it.

In the political perspective of the Movement of the Concrete, freeing labor from the yoke of capital requires and implies freeing it also from alienation understood as non-emotion and disembodiment, both dehumanizing. Little by little, women, young people, volunteers, and amateurs are demonstrating that it is possible to produce by themselves, in collaboration and solidarity with others, without alienation and self-exploitation. Therefore, the activists of the Movement of the Concrete are far from being just thinkers-creators or just concrete. An important point is that these activists now have the possibility to attract, not only the science of the concrete, but also the science of the abstract (i.e., the contribution of engineers and information scientists), bringing together these two different approaches and making them operate and support each other. Women and men are preparing to know what to do and how to do it when the capitalist system collapses under the weight of its structural contradictions and the political maturity of the masses.

On a practical level, this movement has its own specific trajectory of development, different from old and new political movements that generally express their strength with a flurry of actions (public demonstrations, flash mobs, strikes, etc.). To understand the dynamics of the Movement of the Concrete, we should resort to the powerful image of yeast, which is the basis of every good baking process. To acquire the leavening power of the dough, the yeast must rest in a closed space. No spectacular initiatives in open public spaces (streets, squares), but daily work that politically fills spaces like homes, garages, workshops, and laboratories.

The proprietary and competitive logics that once jealously guarded, not only the ownership of the means of production, but also scientific knowledge and practical know-how connected to them, have now given way to four main strategies for dismantling the capitalist logic: open access, community building and mutual support, solidarity, and collaboration. Today, many people around the world are transitioning from end-users to owners of means of production, creative designers, and producers who create original and innovative products to be sold online on dedicated platforms (e.g., Etsy.com or Dawanda.com). With an internet connection and determination, people at home or anywhere can easily connect with other fellow producers or communities worldwide and learn to make things themselves.¹⁹ These new processes of production and consumption are supported by specific web services like Tumblr, WordPress, and YouTube, which have collected and made available to the public millions of tutorials presented by users. This immense repository of how-to guides for all kinds of activities can be seen as a powerful process of mutual and social teaching and learning. Today, people are experiencing the ability and practice of making almost everything, from a cake to a pillowcase or a toy, by themselves, using technology, creative recycling, or innovative materials and processes.²⁰ They are also transforming standardized products into customized ones (see, e.g., the online community of IkeaHackers.net). What women traditionally did in managing their homes and families in isolation has now become a shared and socially recognized strategy.

The Movement of the Concrete offers various places to learn and find inspiring ideas, both original and unusual, and to bring together different political experiences with a common goal: creating common goods (and communism) now at the heart of the capitalist system. Blogs and forums provide online spaces to obtain information and discuss components, tools, software, hardware, 3D printers, etc., sharing knowledge with the online public and posting photos of handmade creations. Blogs on technological artifacts in particular have significantly contributed to the rise in popularity of such artifacts and the implementation of the independent subculture.²¹ Developing skills through cooperation with other ‘producers’ leads not only to the creation and strengthening of social interactions and social innovation, but to the awareness that we no longer need capitalism, that we can build an alternative to it here and now. ‘Producer’ communities constitute a vast social laboratory experimenting with the realization of personalized mass goods, altering the production mechanisms and components with which they can be made. They are reshaping economic models and housing solutions, changing the way science is taught and learned; they provide the momentum that prepares for the post-capitalist society.²² Many speak of it as a new bottom-up industrial revolution, more democratic, participatory, and sustainable.

19 David Gauntlett, *Making Is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

20 Carla Sinclair, “The Crafting of Craft: Welcome to the New Magazine for the New Craft Movement,” *Craft: Transforming Traditional Crafts* 1, no. 1 (October 2006): 7.

21 Kaya Oakes, *Slanted and Enchanted: The Evolution of Indie Culture* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009).

22 Cory Doctorow, *Makers* (New York: Tor Books, 2009).

6. THE POLITICAL STRATEGY OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE CONCRETE

The political strategy of the Movement of the Concrete is intriguing due to its departure from the Marxist tradition. Marx himself, in attempting to envision what society might look like after liberation from the chains of capitalism, put forward the idea that with the end of labor slavery, every human would be free to go fishing or contemplate nature. Thus, he could only imagine leisure activities in a society without capital. Playfulness was seen by him as a sort of compensation for the toil generated by society's liberation from capitalism. Traditionally, one of the limitations of the working-class struggle was considering the only possible solution to be the fight against the capitalist system until its destruction. The aim was to introduce a different social system: communism. For communism to materialize, it had to wait until the end of capitalism. This political approach led to a totalizing view of the power of the capitalist system and paradoxically resulted in the impotence of the working class. The conceptualization of capital as a Moloch, resonating even in the title of the famous book by Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, probably had the effect of reinforcing the capitalist system: the more power attributed to an entity, the more power it gains.²³ On the contrary, the capitalist system covers a very limited part of human history, and its logics are historically determined. The Neolithic period, for example, was much longer and more crucial than what is called modernity. The technologies and innovations invented and implemented during this period were incredibly important for humanity. Therefore, it does not make sense to consider the capitalist system as inevitable and impossible to change or defeat. Furthermore, the capitalist system has many contradictions within its operation, which act as forces of potential self-destruction. After the collapse of communist regimes and the evidence of serious defects and limits in the organization of their societies, people began to practice different approaches and political perspectives. For example, the need to sell labor to an entrepreneur is increasingly perceived as not the only possibility.

From the perspective of millions of people, the transition from working to making is a crucial point. Apparently, it seems like a sort of loss of the social and political part of 'work' and a shift toward its mere practical and material content. In reality, this shift is highly political because it goes to the root of social relations on an economic level, starting from the perspective of a "rebirth based on the end of the regime of paid labor."²⁴ Over the last 250 years, people have lost any control and knowledge of their own work and, in general, of the general organization of labor. This knowledge and this know-how had become hostages of the ruling classes. Consequently, people have been expropriated and have thus lost the sense of what they consume, how the goods they consume have been manufactured, and what effects they have on their bodies as well as on the earth, the air, and water. Therefore, ownership of the means of production by the ruling class has meant the loss of ownership not only over the means of production, but also over knowledge and control of work processes, labor organization, consumption, and the natural forces of social labor like the environment. Having left the unchecked use of land, air, and water to the ruling classes, the environment has suffered greatly from their greed and short-sightedness. Without countermeasures from progressive actors and others, the ruling classes have shown no intention of limiting their exploitation of natural resources or expressing a sustainable vision for the use of such resources. The trouble is that until now, leftist forces have lacked the will and determination to include in their program the political objective of environmental defense, handing over sustainability politics to the Greens. Instead, this is one of the defining points of the Movement of the Concrete.

23 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

24 Franco Berardi Bifo, "Colpo di stato in Grecia," *Comune-info*, 25 June 2015, <https://comune-info.net/colpo-di-stato-in-grecia/>.

The recent developments in immaterial labor and information technologies, which have led to the dematerialization and automation of many processes in society, have further exacerbated the devaluation of material labor and the human body. Communication, education, affection, emotion, and sociability—the areas that women have always mastered more adeptly—have been mediated by an extraordinary flow of technological innovation, giving men greater capabilities than women and therefore pre-eminence in some of these sectors as well. Despite the potential of digital technologies, their use has so far been heavily conditioned by capitalist logics that deny life and thus have introduced the inorganic into the living heart of society.

The Movement of the Concrete is generating a revaluation of material labor by appropriating the production process and, therefore, the consumption of goods, and discovering the potential of working with one's hands. By returning to the science of the concrete and the possibility of building technologies that enhance life, it aims to ensure open access to knowledge for all and to promote processes such as sharing, collaboration, and cooperation. In the various strands of this movement, men and women are not yet evenly distributed. For example, developers of free software are still predominantly men, while women are more involved in craftsmanship. However, I imagine that they will not remain segregated by gender for long. In the near future, the science of the concrete will be able to capture all the good that exists in the science of the abstract as it has been developed so far. For example, social robotics and 3D printers will be valuable tools produced by people for their well-being. Home-based work has become even more complex now. People have more opportunities to design and therefore control what they eat, how things are produced, stored, and marketed. Consequently, the revolution brought about by the Movement of the Concrete concerns not only the field of production considered in all its phases, but also that of consumption and everything that happens in the reproductive sphere.

Reflecting on the Movement of the Concrete is a good exercise, not only for political scientists, but for any activist.

AUTHOR

Leopoldina Fortunati is a feminist Marxist, activist, and theorist. She is a professor of Sociology of Culture and Communication at the University of Udine, Italy. She has authored many articles and books, including the seminal *The Arcane of Reproduction: Domestic Work, Prostitution, Labor, and Capital* (1981, trans. 1995). In 2016 she was named a member of the Academia Europaea for her scientific contribution to gender studies and new media, and in 2023 she became an ICA Fellow.