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## Land Labour Capital and the City

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Deirdre O'Mahony  
To: "Lucy R. Lippard"

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Dear Lucy,

Some ideas were sparked by the Creative Time Summit statement - and I was puzzled. I found myself thinking about your writing on art that can make visible the power relations that affect the construction and shaping of contemporary places. Why, in the summit statement, was the invisible 'other' not mentioned, that which sustains the city with fundamentals - the countryside? Cities are not isolated, *bordered* entities - they are produced by interrelations with local places and producers.

At its most basic, food is produced in the countryside. Global agri-business, does not value uneconomic, tacit knowledge, has changed *how* this is produced, driving small and medium farms out of business. This knowledge is extant among farmers today but becoming increasingly redundant given the paradigmatic shift presently underway, from the rural as a site of food production to becoming an arena of cultural production. Across the world, land workers are forced to move to cities while paradoxically, increasing numbers of urbanites want to know the provenance of their food; they want to buy good produce and, it appears, are invested in the culture of local food knowledge and production.

Nature is no longer a local affair: people will always desire and need the experience of nature. As European agricultural subsidies are phased out, 'high nature value' landscapes - destinations for urban tourists, are seen as key drivers in rural economies. Environmental values often take priority over agricultural values, especially in areas that produce little food, but where the particular type of farming results in a beautiful landscape. Increasingly I hear farmers speak of a sense of cultural estrangement as 'farming landscape' is not the same as producing food. Subsidies are linked to the care and maintenance of landscapes and regulated by scientists who, although versed in botanical diversity, have little understanding of the interaction between human, social and natural ecosystems that has produced the very places they want to protect. Debates over the implementation of Conservation legislation are often dominated by urban elites who are well versed in lobbying and governed by an aesthetic perspective on landscape. The application and interpretation of this legislation then becomes a cause of conflict.

Artists, working durationally in both rural and urban sites, have a key role to play in providing cultural space to re-examine and re-present complex questions, perspectives and voices that are unheard or cannot yet be heard. Given the increasingly precarious food security issues in cities worldwide, cultural agencies and artists need to make the link between culture and agriculture, rural and post urban, artist and agri+culturist. They then need to connect rural knowledge to urban sites in order to drive a sustainable food policy for future cities. The following quote by James Lang brings home this moment's urgency, galvanizing me into writing to you.

With the domestication of crops, humankind set down the path to the city. We are about to end that journey decisively and forever. The global reach of the modern city is uprooting the last great village cultures of Asia. Humankind may never be the same.

All the best, Deirdre