

Sottosopra

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IMAGINE WORK

*a manifesto on the work of women and men, written
by women and aimed at everybody; because the discourse on equality
is full of holes and feminism is no longer enough*

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**LOOKING AHEAD AND PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES BRINGS BENEFITS
AND LETS FREEDOM GROW**

DEAR FEMALE FRIEND

Whenever I tell you that women are present on the labour market, with qualified skills and in qualified positions, you object: yes, they are present, but there aren't enough of them; yes, they're there, but some are forced to give up work, mostly due to motherhood and now due to the recession too; yes, they do hold qualified positions, but not the best paid, most prestigious ones; and in any case, they are also those who suffer the highest unemployment and least job security.

What you say is true to some extent, but it does not entirely describe reality.

Yet you are convinced that you're more of a realist than me. You use the same mental framework as forty years ago, when we were entering the workplace en masse, so you can't see the path we've taken, and how much that path has changed the way things are.

Rather than looking ahead at the ground still to cover on our way towards the "full and equal" participation of women, I look back at the way we've come, and I see that it is enough to allow us the first attempts at reflection and taking stock.

We can autonomously state our thoughts on:

How and why we stably entered paid work (too) en masse,

What the consequences of this revolution are,

What new problems there are to be tackled.

In short, you know as well as I do that nowadays there's not a single woman who feels she's part of a "weak category" to be supported, protected and promoted in the eternal race towards equality with men. Instead, we have plenty of new points of view and we want to find the words to state them freely.

Plenty: both because there are plenty of us, and because we are involved in many things. For example, I want to state my opinions about work, the environment, the economy and the future. Not so much on politics: a lot has been said already and I don't see that there's that much willingness to listen.

Rather, I feel that we practice politics when we manage to publicly express our points of view.

Yours affectionately

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DEAR MALE FRIEND

Whenever you hear talk about policies for women's employment you always agree.

Fair pay? Of course, it goes without saying! You're forward-thinking and you like to think you understand women. And the idea that women aspire to reach men's level of power and money is something you can't help but find gratifying, even if it costs you a few sacrifices at times. I've waited for you to get a clear idea of what was happening,

but now I want to help you to clear up a few misunderstandings:

men are not our benchmark for comparison, and what's more, we are not particularly satisfied with the world that you have built. That's not all: women are not a category, we don't need to be liberated or protected, helped or favoured.

Perhaps what you haven't really understood is that our freedom changes your life. It challenges your work, your economics, your politics. Think about it. All of you should think about it.

Yours affectionately

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We are women of various ages, experiences, knowledge and talents. For years we have been meeting up and meeting other women and listening to them. We think and write about work, seeking to give an account of this practice through thoughts and communication. For we believe that thinking as a group, starting from experiences and not just knowledge, does not just produce further knowledge to add to the ideas market, but leads to, and in fact already is, politics.

1. PRIMUM VIVERE. EVEN IN TIMES OF CRISIS

*The work that is necessary to live consists of paid work and of relationships.
There is an open contradiction on this point with those who do not see that,
even in economics, there are two sexes*

A world economic crisis, just like a war, causes a strong sense of disproportion: between what you do day after day to protect your desires and the relations that make them possible, and the enormity of what you should be doing (and who with?) to overcome the crisis or stop the war. You would like to change that reality.

Yet you know, due to your experience of life and of the world, that if it is to begin, the change begins from inside the life of the individual. The thought process that can change reality begins with the desires and interests of women and men in flesh and blood.

Economics, even the kind which is most critical of capitalism, analyses and reasons using the same categories as always: thoughts in which human life becomes the subject of books, articles and decisions. At the same time, it cancels out the subjectivity of someone who, for example, wants to work and spend many hours with his or her children. Or someone who wants to be able to breathe, and drink clean water. Or someone who knows that if the indiscriminate race for consumption starts up again, the economy will run but the world will explode.

Why do the world's nations continue to give money to banks, insurance companies or airlines on the brink of bankruptcy, and give almost nothing to those who work, maybe even 80 hours a week like women do, or are unemployed?

It's true that some economists saw this crisis coming. Yet they continue to insist on public intervention to keep actual demand for consumer goods high. Without asking themselves: what consumption? Which needs? They never talk about needs which are the expression of a new freedom.

So you find that you can leave the economists to their fate, and the disproportion becomes bravado: perhaps the crisis is a chance to state our point of view more forcefully. You can decide to leave aside the classic categories of economics: balance sheets, GNP, European parameters, development/consumption and so on. You can go down another path, that glimpsed by women who are in the so-called labour market with their own desires, needs and interests. Among these, the most keenly felt is the need for relationships, because women know that you are born dependent, and you die dependent. They also know that adult autonomy feeds on the ability to form relationships, while loneliness can lead to a far more mortal suffering than a lack of money. There's one way of being part of the market which involves bringing it much more than goods and money: the addition of affection, words, sociability, caring for others. Men and women can gain happiness from relationships with others.

You can demonstrate that there's no point in separating life time from work time, and therefore you demand that the concept of work and of work time changes. And starting from here, from work considered as a unit of paid work and of relations, you claim to redefine economics and social and political theory.

And it is here that you come into conflict with those who care only about productive, paid work. Staring the contradiction in the face is the first step to overcoming it. So there's a need to set out some solid points for debate:

- there are two sexes involved in economics too, and their conflictual relationship in the workplace and the economy makes it necessary to depart from the unilateral nature of the current (male) economy;
- the concepts and words that once seemed universal have already been challenged and dismantled by various women, including women economists;
- all this would suggest a change in civilization (*primum vivere* – “living comes first”) as well as in the measures and rules of the economy.

Primum vivere is possible on condition that more and more men can be led to take part in the daily goings on of life. They will start to see things differently and to understand women. Many men do this already. But they don't transfer their experience into words, and do not see how much this shift changes them in themselves and in relation to others. Above all, they do not consider the experience and knowledge of daily life as leverage for changing work and the

economy. Women are closer to achieving this new awareness, but the contents of this document are intended for all, men and women alike.

EVEN HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN POINTS THE FINGER AT ECONOMISTS

“How is it possible that nobody could see this appalling crisis coming?”

This indignant outburst from Queen Elizabeth II, at an official ceremony at the London School of Economics in November 2008, made the international news: even Her Majesty sought answers from the economists that we never got.

2. NOW THAT WE'RE FAMILIAR WITH WORK

We're in the workplace and we're ready to say what we don't agree with.

And to take on new responsibilities, along with new freedoms

Work is adapted to fit men, the traditional kind. It assumes a central position in a person's day and lifetime that is only possible if all care for oneself and others is delegated to someone else: to women, the traditional kind. The older women among us knew this even back in the 1970s: the old joke went that every working woman needed a wife.

In any case, many of us have tried to adhere to that way of working, and have got involved: it's seductive, exciting. A lot of us have had great success. How? Firstly because Wonder Woman really does exist: her magical powers are a secret kept by every woman who hurries down the street, who reads on the tram, who smiles at you at the checkout. Some have also found active cooperation: a supportive partner, helpful grandparents.

Some of us have been so caught up in making it, in feeling in our muscles and on our skin that we are capable, competent, educated, efficient, decisive, balanced, that we never realised how much we were changing: this has also revealed an obstinate toughness, ruthless dedication, the fear of seeing a dreaded weakness mirrored in other women. Consumed by the effort of succeeding, by the satisfaction of our achievements, we were left with too little energy to notice that there are also conflicts that need to be addressed at work, at home and, first of all, within ourselves: on the contrary, in the spirit of these years, we've convinced ourselves that raising problems would be a sign of weakness, would not be a successful enough approach. When in fact, it simply implies an awareness of diversities and of complexity. It is possible to love even when arguing.

We did not even have the energy left to see that relationships can be formed and solidarity can be found with other women striving for success: they convinced us that sooner or later, relationships let you down, and that you achieve more on your own.

But now, and perhaps the financial crisis has something to do with it, helping us to see more clearly, there are many women, younger and older, who do not want to be crushed or seduced by that style of working; by a type of career and an idea of success which does not respect life, which marginalises relationships and personal growth. We are not going to leave our jobs, and we're ready to speak out about what we are dissatisfied with. And to take on new responsibilities, together with new freedoms.

We women, more so than men, are aware that there is no division between life and work; what makes us happy in life makes us happy at work, and vice versa. That's why it's up to us to lead the battle, which is needed once again, to change the rules of the workplace and improve everybody's quality of life. We can no longer let the conditions of work – which are often the enemy of our most basic desires – change us intimately, as individuals.

I'M GOOD AT THIS

I work hard and I work well. Many women share this same awareness: being passionately committed, totally caught up in work, not skimping on hours, feeling their abilities improving, accepting challenges and targets, discovering they're good at it. It's the pleasure of working,

measuring up to oneself first and foremost. It's rightfully expecting to receive gratification, money and power as recognition for their commitment and the quality of their work.

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THE WEAKNESS OF THE OTHER WOMAN

"Female bosses are the worst". This cliché so beloved of the media (men are excited by warring women) is undoubtedly reflected in reality. It's hard to create a world tailored to women too. But it has to be done. That implacable severity that women have with other women, and above all with themselves, may be anger about the difference of the other woman, fear of being contaminated by her weakness. In order to gain authority, women dominion, sometimes all it takes is to go a step further, adding a touch of humour.

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AT THE WINDOW

"Ten, twelve hour days in the office. Neon lights, air-con, windows sealed shut. But I could look out of the windows. In the office I was a man. At the window I became a woman again. For years, my gaze provided an escape. I didn't know it then, but what I was spying on from the window was none other than the life. Meanwhile, for years, I never even opened the shutters at home, like thousands of others. Why bother? It would already be dark by the time I got home anyway."

3. WORK IS MUCH MORE

Work is what we need to live

Looking after the house each day to make it welcoming and comfortable • Preparing meals and washing up • Regularly purchasing all the household goods • Washing and ironing clothes and home linen • Raising and educating children • Choosing and combining goods and services • Liaising with institutions and bureaucracy • Making the necessary payments by the due dates • Safeguarding personal health and ensuring contact with medical bodies • Guaranteeing emergency intervention in the infinite crises of daily life • Listening, reassuring, consoling those who live with us, day by day • Inventing solutions, solving problems, dealing with others' needs, tailoring intervention to the person • Managing one's sense of guilt if failing to solve a problem • Helping those going through a period of dependency • Assisting those who are temporarily ill • Looking after those who are not self-sufficient • Accompanying those who are getting older • Cultivating relationships and affection with friends, relatives and acquaintances • Staying up-to-date and informed to ensure all the above can be carried out satisfactorily. All of this is work that is necessary to live.

A creative, entrepreneurial kind of work which involves choices and investments, brings values and desires into play, intelligence and knowledge. A kind of work in which we learn, innovate and invent, we choose and decide, combining multiple skills and resources, and exercising their freedom. But this work is not quantifiable. It has no name. It is not seen.

It is not seen in the GDP, it is not seen in the pay packet, it is not seen in the indicators of the wellbeing of nations and individuals.

It is a vast amount of work: in all of the advanced economies, including those in Northern Europe, it occupies overall a number of hours greater than those spent on paid work. This is the ghost hanging over Europe today.

Above all it is women who do, and who know how to do, all of this work.

Daily life experience and a knowledge of all the work that's needed to live can provide leverage to change the economy.

NAMES FOR INEXPRESSIBLE WORK

Domestic work • Family work • Basic work • Reproduction work • Social reproduction work • Care work. Abstract, edifying, depressing words: they certainly don't bring to mind the good things in life.

4. THE ART OF LIFE MAINTENANCE: A MATRIX FOR THE FUTURE, NOT DOMESTIC ARCHAEOLOGY

This work cannot be eliminated. In fact, it will increase

We Italian women are famous among international academics for our domestic dedication – especially for the outstanding care we take over our homes: the average Italian home is in fact as sparkling as a showroom compared to a home in France, the UK or US. Italian men are also famous among academics: they carry on acting like eternal children, moving from the care of *mamma* to the attentions of a wife or partner who will iron their shirts (it's no coincidence that non-iron shirts have never caught on in Italy).

In short: among the wealthy nations, Italian women do the most domestic work overall, while Italian men do the least. These are the basic figures for the daily average:

WOMEN'S DOMESTIC WORK: 5H 47 MIN ITALIANS, 3H 36 MIN NORWEGIANS

MEN'S DOMESTIC WORK: 1H 55 MIN ITALIANS, 2H 24 MIN NORWEGIANS

You see? Even in the wealthiest, most equal countries with the best services, women continue to do more work in the home than men.

But before pointing out the unfairness (which exists), let's face facts: taking care of daily life cannot be eliminated from our lives. It is vital in the strictest sense of the word and so far, even with the best services in the world, it has never taken up less than 3 hours a day on average for every adult aged between 20 and 80 (6 hours per couple/family). It's not archaeology, a throwback to the past. It is the live, material exchange that is woven into our human existence. And this work is not set to decrease. Far from it, it is the matrix of the future. It tends to grow, because the social and economic system shifts new responsibilities onto the individual. Every man and woman has an increasingly tight schedule of objectives: to be good looking, youthful, healthy, successful, fulfilled, affluent and happy is a huge job. It is increasingly more specialist and complex, and is the source of insecurities and emotional stress that must be cured in private. Moreover, there is a gradual ageing of the population which will push up the number of dependent individuals.

The problem is, who does all this work and who will do it in the future, with what kind of freedom and recognition for it? So far, in every country, it is "naturally" done to a greater extent by women.

This work is complex and essential. It connects and gives meaning to the daily life of adults and children, genders and generations. And men, with their supposed independence, are less aware of it, despite the fact that they need it as much as anyone.

Many make an effort, but the consequences are rarely seen for the market, in economics or in politics.

As for us women: it is clear that in order to ensure the daily maintenance of our own lives and those of others, we limit our presence in the workplace if we can; this is another reason why often we do less well in our careers, and are less well-paid.

Question: do women work less on the market because they find the work/life mix more stimulating and interesting; or do they suffer working for daily life as a practical necessity and a cultural imperative? Perhaps they are on the way to finding out. Perhaps they would like to be able to choose, to change the balance in the various stages of their lives.

The life/work mix is a strong, leading signal that interweaves freedom with obligation.

If we were to work on it, it would bring forth plenty of stimulating thoughts for the future of everyone.

Meanwhile, the equality discourse simplifies things and offers the solution of dividing the work on relationships and in the home "fairly" between the sexes. But this kind of division cannot be defined by law, and nor should it be: anyone can see that this would make life hell for any couple living together.

And anyway, how would the slackers be punished, and by whom?

At this point, the equality discourse pulls another magic word out of the hat to eliminate the conflict: reconciliation between the two jobs for both sexes. But as we have seen in every country, including the most virtuous Nordic nations, it is above all women who tend to request part time work and flexible hours. Does this happen because we are dragging behind us the remnants of the old division of work between the sexes or because many women like this kind of work? Or because the conflict between men and women living together is difficult to manage, and the law certainly doesn't help? These are the questions that are never asked by the "simplifiers".

At this point, there is a growing awareness that the discourse on equality and parity, when it comes to the difference between the sexes – which, put very simply, is a difference in how they relate to the world and to others – loses all its supposed nobility and instead seems to be a simplification that comes to nothing.

Rendering equal, reconciling and whatever else in actual fact only covers up the conflict that there is in work, whether it's productive work or work to reproduce life. The difference is that the latter rebels against laws and monetization. Indeed, it has much higher stakes: to keep the loving relationship alive in conflict, and to turn freedom and limitation into experience.

THE MEDITERRANEAN EXCEPTION

Gender studies show that in wealthier nations, if you add up work in the home (unpaid) and outside the home (paid), there tends to be an equal balance between genders. In other words: overall, men and women work the same number of hours, but women do more domestic work and men do more paid work. There are exceptions to this "rule": Italy, Spain and France. Here, women continue to work overall more hours than men because although they work outside the home, they have not reduced the hours of domestic work. Perhaps this is another reason why the food is so good in these countries (and obesity is less common)?

MEN AND THE ART OF LIFE MAINTENANCE

Many men know about this art. They apply it especially to the lives of cars and motorbikes. When it comes to vehicles, they are able to offer daily attention, intelligent, close listening skills, awareness of subtleties, ability to prevent problems, faith in small daily attentions, generosity with their time, pleasure in exchanging opinions and knowledge, gratification with the results achieved.

5. THE DOUBLE YES

We choose it all. The pleasure of being with our children and of working well

Why the need to assert this "double yes"?

There is a need, because it has become almost impossible, especially in Italy.

As the world of work has gradually (and reluctantly) opened its doors to us, we've found ourselves faced with the crudeness of a society which considers having and raising children as an impediment and a dysfunction.

Some women are still forced to conceal their intentions to have children, others still are obliged to sign statements promising they will not get pregnant.

We are excellent workers but only if we don't let our domestic problems interfere, and we do not clutter our work with stories about children that need to be nurtured, looked after and nursed when they get sick.

If we then challenge the situation by deciding to become mothers despite it all, we know that the price to pay almost always is our marginality.

Marginalisation at work means personal humiliation and mortification. It means losing one's financial and psychological independence. It means a marginal position in the public sphere, and a lack of influence in decisions which go beyond one's own close circle of family and

relationships. In order to keep these effects to a minimum, we are capable of performing remarkable balancing acts, which nevertheless come hand in hand with a sense of guilt. Never before as today has there been such a sense of fear, insecurity and ambivalence surrounding motherhood (as can be seen from the many blogs written by new mothers), so much so that it can prevent the desire for motherhood arising in the first place. Because nobody, male or female, wants to be forced back into the darkness of the past. And because, in a society where motherhood is idealised in sickly sweet advertising images while being hindered in real life, there is a strongly felt, lethal risk of loneliness and a lack of support.

We would like to be able to describe this ambivalence.

When we say yes to motherhood, we fulfil a desire that is imprinted in our bodies and minds. A desire that, when it is freely acted out, brings with it the need and the emotional and physical pleasure of being close to our child. Not just when she/he is very small, but intermittently, throughout various phases of development.

Children require a physical presence, as well as an emotional and mental presence.

And time. The time to understand; because motherhood is a totally new experience in the biography of every woman, and it can have some overwhelming effects. Time to nurture a totally dependent being. Time to build relationships and affections. Time to raise a child: it takes listening, dialogue, examples, waiting. All of this entails a different kind of rapport with time. And the other work, the one which produces wealth, has to measure up to this time.

We want to be able to say yes to work and yes to motherhood, without feeling forced to choose between them. When we say yes to work, we say yes to an aspect of life which is the money needed to pay for food, clothes, housing. However, it is also personal fulfilment, growth, invention, a social project. We do not want to be excluded from that, should we choose to be mothers.

Fatherhood is written differently in the bodies and minds of men, and we know little about it.

Fathers do not speak out, do not talk about it. Yet much is changing for them, too. Fatherhood is no longer guaranteed by the female destiny: if today's men want to become fathers, they have to face up to the choice that women have.

Now, more than ever before, reproduction is not a female question: it is everybody's problem, men and women, mothers and fathers.

The double yes that we want contains the desire and the ambition to combine production and reproduction: that which male-dominated history and culture have separated.

DAUGHTERS AND MOTHERS

"In my mother's day, motherhood wasn't a choice but work was. Now, on the other hand, motherhood is a choice, work is a necessity. Jobs weren't as precarious as today, and our fathers were richer than our husbands are. My mother chose to work because for her it was a conquest. I myself, today, couldn't stay at home, while I did choose to have children. This is the paradox. It's both a strength and a weakness."

6. WORK SEEN FROM THE INSIDE: A DIFFERENT SYSTEM IS POSSIBLE

It's not women's desires and timing that are out of step with the labour market.

It is the way work is organized that alienates everybody's lives, men and women alike

Let's tell a story. A story like many others, far too many.

It's a story in two acts, and it even has a happy ending – well, happy enough.

Most of the third act still needs to be written, but we know what it should contain.

ACT ONE

The sad isolation of a working mother with two degrees and a postgraduate qualification

I am the only woman working in the “Human Resources Department” of a large company. I like it a lot, although sometimes it seems less professional than I’d like. I’m happy when I find out I’m pregnant. It’s a particularly difficult pregnancy and birth. I have to – and want to – stay at home for many months, a year and half in all. I go back to work with a horizontal part-time arrangement, half a day every day. Naively, I don’t make any attempt to hide that my choice to work part-time is “forever”!

They don’t know what to do with me so they decide to “hand me over” to the very young, fast-tracked boss. I have less autonomy than before, and a lower professional status. I no longer have the right to use the secretaries. I try not to “demote myself”, but it’s tough. An unforeseen event (top-level resignation) means the office is restructured. I am sent to the Legal Department. This throws me, and I’m worried because I do have a PhD in Employment Law, but my first degree was in Political Science and not Law. The Law Dept. is small: one manager, one lawyer and two people to do admin and secretarial duties. I have trouble fitting in; the office doesn’t do employment law (which I know about), and my idea of working side by side with the lawyer to learn the ropes turns out to be impossible to put into practice.

I can’t even learn by myself: the office has next to nothing in the way of journals, books, codices or database to consult. Perhaps I am not up to the job, I tell myself.

And so, at the age of 37 I decide to enrol on a law degree. I tell my colleagues proudly, expecting support and encouragement from the company. But how strange! Although they don’t try and obstruct me, they certainly don’t show any enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the HR director agrees to change my part time schedule: three days in the office, two at home (for studying). It’s hard work but I have high hopes: I feel I’ve got what it takes to go into law!

Meanwhile, I still occupy a marginal position in my team. I feel cut out.

Rather than pretend to work while surfing the net, sometimes I study law without hiding the fact, in the belief that the company will decide to turn a blind eye. How I wish I’d never done that: I end up being relegated to filing work. Despite it all, when I turn 40 I celebrate my second degree, in Law. At the same time the office is restructured: this is my moment, I tell myself. But instead I still have to do filing, with the addition of some accounting and reporting. The sentence is final. I feel trapped.

ACT TWO

The arrival of an illuminated manager brings satisfaction and new hopes

It’s now six years since I went on maternity leave. There’s a new, more radical reorganisation of the legal department: additional staff and a new manager.

There are new, “textbook” style rules: all professionals to work as a team, me included; monitoring of targets and not of hours worked; enhancement of individual competencies.

A weekly meeting is set up, which is arranged to take into account my part-time schedule. All of the work is shared in a network, with mutual exchange of information. We are all given databases, journals, monographs. Even I, a part-timer, am included in the Legal English refresher course. Emergencies are considered an exception to the rule. We are strongly encouraged to use e-mail, even with our boss – that way you don’t have to wait to have a meeting to get things okayed. Part of the paralegal work which used to be offloaded on me is spread across all the professionals.

The manager takes responsibility, so that even I, still on my three-day vertical part-time job, know that nothing nasty will happen in the two days I’m away from the office. My boss won’t make me look bad just because I’m not there.

And I do my bit to avoid mishaps. I check my email from home, and am available on my mobile phone. Now, six years on from becoming a mother, I can manage this, and am happy to do so. Mine has become a rare case of a part-time job which is not met with hostility from colleagues.

ACT THREE

Still to be written, it would have a happy happy ending

It should contain:

- a breakdown of the wall of identical hours for men and women for the whole of their lives: the world of work is no longer populated just by the heads of families, and many jobs today are assessed on targets rather than on time. Therefore, workers, male or female, can negotiate and adjust the time they spend working in one day and throughout their lives.
- an unmasking of the presumed objectivity of merit. Merit does not exist in nature, it is a human product: instead of being based on the quality of work and skills, which can be assessed using transparent, controllable criteria, it is currently based on “political” loyalty to the firm, unlimited availability in terms of hours, short-time rapaciousness, *do ut des* and so on.
- space for another kind of competition, which centres around work, transparent goals and responsibilities. Which enables the utmost accessibility to and circulation of available knowledge, inside and outside the company. Which makes it possible to cooperate or clash with colleagues and superiors, without destroying relationships and without establishing or suffering pointless distances.

Today, the world of work is full of rules and rituals that have been put together to celebrate play-offs between the contenders, to establish hierarchies between winners and losers, to maintain and strengthen the machines of power and the distances of rank. These games are still very popular with many men. They are costly games, which are of little interest to many women: they get in the way, weigh things down and waste time.

- bonuses for managers who are able to organise work in a flexible way, taking into account the time requirements put forward by male or female employees. And financial incentives to companies that demonstrate this type of social responsibility.

7. TIRED OF EQUALITY

The patriarchy is dead. The word itself is redolent of the last century. The reason we can say it's dead is not because it is no longer seen and because discrimination and sometimes appalling injustices have disappeared; but because it is dead in women's hearts. That is what killed it off. Patriarchs, those who still believe they own women freedom and, as men, believe they are the source of universal values – good for everybody, male and female – can see this for themselves, if they want to.

Also dead is the idea of equality. In other words, the need to measure up to the paradigms of a world ruled only by men. The daughters and granddaughters of those women who broke down the pillars of that world with the first self-awareness, now walk alongside their fellow travellers, confused, frightened warriors, and feel that all labels are reductive and old. Rather than wanting to be equal with men, they ask themselves how they can become equal to themselves: how the whole of society can rethink its institutions and rules, taking into account their life experience and intelligence too.

8. SPEAKING LISTENING NEGOTIATING

What can be done? Political proposals.

A new self-awareness: taking oneself into account, and not just thinking about oneself, is the political recommendation that we give to both men and women. It can help to draw together the threads of a shared experience, and overcome the awkwardness of fragmentation. Giving credit to one's own experience and desires. Creating places in which to express them. Getting to know each other, mirroring oneself in other men and women. Starting to describe that which feminist self-awareness did not yet know about: then, the debate was about sexuality and the patriarchy; now it is about the meaning of work, of being mothers and fathers, the welfare of the planet.

Listening: there are women and men who are already speaking. Negotiating: with oneself, between desires and tiredness, thinking small and thinking big, to give value to all of our time. Negotiating with those who live with us, at home, in the city, at work, so that the boundaries

between the self and the other remain moveable and do not become barriers. Negotiating with those who stand in our way with the intention of blocking us or directing us. These proposals have a horizon, which we will try to trace out briefly. Politics is in a deep crisis: indifference, growing injustice, a managerial class which is mediocre or worse. In Italy, particularly, the crisis can be felt in the decline of the parties, in the fragility of the unions, the emptying out of democracy and representation, the flattening of the media, the silence of culture. And in individuals sense of bewilderment in their relationships. This crisis is making it clear to many that managing (well or badly) a position of power (whether large or small) is not politics. Politics means turning power relations into free relationships and, where there was once conformity, unleashing personal resources. How can this be put into practice? There are many levels of response, depending on the context of personal and communal life, but there's one constant condition: to not take on the logic of power (rivalry, instrumental use of people), but that of relations: giving and receiving (this includes criticism and real conflict); inspiring confidence; earning together. This can be done at every level, in political parties and newspapers, in the family and on TV; even in prison (Mandela). For many women, this political knowledge grew out of the feminist awareness. Now, it is met with a global demand for fairer politics. But this does not mean that feminism has triumphed. On the contrary, it is time for feminists to turn over a new leaf. The task of changing relationships, which in turn changes the world, requires the presence of men and women who communicate with each other, in theoretical research and in action. We say this having listened to the demand which comes from things themselves.

9. IMAGINING THE FUTURE

Imagine that all the unpaid work which is necessary for living, and is done above all by women, is included in national budgets and is recognised as a contribution that is crucial to the wealth of all. And that there is a general agreement to facilitate this work, value it and redistribute it.

In fact, imagine that its beauty and usefulness is revealed to such an extent that every man and woman hopes to do at least a little of it themselves.

Imagine that male and female workers working for the market – which is no longer the only recognised source of affluence – have the contractual power to negotiate flexible hours which take into account the schedule of their lives. Imagine that work functions with transparent rules; that it is able to recognise and value difference skills and types of creativity, providing not just money but gratification and recognition too. Imagine that a sense of responsibility and the ability to work with others is rewarded.

So imagine that, taking all of the above into account, a different concept of development comes naturally, one which takes care of the world for tomorrow's inhabitants. Just how men and women have learned how to take care of children by relating to them.

Imagine that men are tired of reasserting their worn out identity and of playing at war in every form, and that they relate to other human beings. Imagine, then, that women are no longer driven to imitate men, despite themselves, in the only public game that is allowed, at the price of agonising effort.

Imagine that this dead politics that you see around you now, is finally buried and gives way to something new that feeds on life, as narrated by every individual.

Many people believe that all of this is impossible, and that it is therefore damaging and pointless to imagine it. Or rather, since they think that it's pointless and damaging to imagine it, they say that it's impossible.

We, however, think that...

10. LOOKING AHEAD AND PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES BRINGS BENEFITS AND LETS FREEDOM GROW

(Translation by Catherine Salbasha)