

# ON THE NECESSITY OF CONCEIVING THE UTOPIAN IN A FEMINIST FASHION

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THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS on the relationship between feminism and utopia are not presented as definitive. Feminism is far too diverse and utopian thinking far too disputed, to allow for this. Rather I approach the topic by pondering the specific importance of feminist ideas for political action and the importance specifically of feminist ideas in envisaging another society. In my opinion feminism needs to be understood in the context of liberation theory, and the utopian in the context of critical socialism and revolutionary 'realpolitik'. Being a resident of the previously divided, currently old and new Germany, requires me also to consider certain local particularities.

In addressing the relation between utopia and feminism I find myself in a paradoxical situation because feminism is for me already a political utopia, the idea of abolishing domination and the wish to do so, to reach a goal where what everyone has in common is also common to everyone. The fact that I naturally identify feminism with utopia may seem peculiar. Doesn't utopia have to do with wishes, visions, that is, with irrationality and, if this is true, do reasonable plans, suggestions, and criticism not suffice when we are dealing with societal changes, especially in the case of women? The answer seems to me as certain as the interconnection between feminism and utopia: the situation of women today is so muddled and patriarchy is so solid, so alive and well, that improvements in the here and now do not suffice. We have to look back and devise something new, and then from this different perspective, we will be able to make suggestions for today and tomorrow. As Virginia Woolf put it in her novel, *The Three Guineas*, '... we can best help you prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods.'<sup>1</sup>

## 1. FROM EARLY UTOPIAS TO SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM

We need to be aware of the development of utopian thought in order to have a platform from which – and in contrast to which – we can think about the utopian in a feminist fashion. We need at least a somewhat clear understanding of the relation between desire, illusion, and realistic, reasonable politics. Committed to the tradition of liberation theory, I am concerned with the relationship of utopian thought to scientific analysis and criticism, in order to locate the feminist in this context.

Due to adversities in their everyday lives, human beings (women as well as men) flee in their dreams to more desirable worlds. Early utopias (More, Proudhon) portray a simple reversal of the customary: eternal youth, an abundance of food, luxuries without value, and gold and gems which are no longer the basic unit in terms of which worth is measured. Wise conversations, perpetual festivities, the portrayal of beauty, and, most importantly, the abolition of suffering born of domination and exploitation. Criticism of this world flies in the imagination to another place, a non-place or utopia, which at the same time should be home. This occurs in fairy tales, stories, paintings, and utopian novels.

The first criticism of utopian thought which can be taken seriously, and which I need to call to mind in my search for the specifics of feminist-utopian thought, came from Marx and Engels. In their attempt to mobilize the current forces in society, they shifted the focus and intention of utopian thinking. Socialism as the turn ‘from utopia to science’ had two purposes: to integrate fleeting wishes with precise criticism, and to examine both history and life in order to determine what was humanly possible. They intended to discover the ‘elements of the new society’ in the old one, and to discern the making of an emancipated society out of the contradictions of present conditions; and what they discovered and discerned was to be supported. For this they required a scientific approach. Political strategies need prior analysis and critique. The wings of desire were to be linked to human action. This of course included criticism of these desires as criticism of present conditions, since even dreams bear the traces of domination and subjugation; i.e., criticism of the conditions of individuals in their ties with the quotidian. Wishes should fall from the weightless heavens to be mobilized for the remodelling of society. One concentrates no longer on setting and imagining the specificities of a new social order but instead begins collecting the building blocks for new paths to a new order. Only vague contours, or rather intentions, are specified: freedom from domination, the unfolding of human nature in its various manifestations, collective self-determination and great wisdom.

## 2. FAREWELL TO SOCIALISM?

What became of the critique of political economy in ‘official’ Marxism is generally well-known: a self-assured confidence that one was on the right path. Abandoning utopia in favour of ‘science’ came to mean reducing the abundance of desires to what had already been achieved. The solution was: they are always fulfilled. One way of achieving this was by disciplining desires to

conform with the reasons of state, for example through the medium of television, which brought the far-off into the living room.

In protest at how the designers of ‘actually existing’ socialism dealt with the utopian, Bloch wrote early on: ‘It appeared that one had already discovered the tendency of being, that is, that one had already arrived beyond it.’<sup>2</sup> Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope* attempted to merge the force of human desires with analytic, scientific critique. Anticipation, walking erect, liberation, fulfilment, references to utopia, dreams of the future, and the ‘shining through’ of what was to come – Bloch’s work is full of evocative words that seek magnetically to hold open the possibility of liberation in the ‘not-yet’. Bloch was expelled from East Germany. The country collapsed a little more than a quarter of a century later.

Conventional talk about the loss of political utopia as a consequence of the collapse of the ‘actually existing’ socialist regimes is characteristically at odds with the actual course of events, even if this is in some ways understandable. Even if we ignore the difference between utopian and scientific socialism, talk about the loss of utopia mourns the fact that the ‘hereafter’ has been stolen, or that the chance of creating another world has been done away with for good, whereas in reality we are dealing with a much more unusual situation, namely that the utopian has ceased to appear grounded in this world. Or to put it another way: the collapse of the formerly socialist countries frees desires and wishes which were confined to those petty conditions and restores them to the status of hopes for a shining future and plans for liberation; and last but not least, the force of scientific analysis is also set free. The critique of capitalism becomes more urgent than ever, both questions about what causes crises and catastrophes, and where elements of a new humane, just, and ecologically benign society may be found. Social development would once again be driven by the hope and fantasy of a world in which it would not only be possible to live, but even desirable.

The question of why we need political utopia seems easy to answer. Without the hope that the world can be changed and without being able to place oneself in a movement for change, it is difficult to live; at most it is merely possible to survive. The continuous present, a life without future expectations, becomes stifling apathy. People have to be sure of their history in order to ensure their future. But as soon as we leave the abstract generality of humankind and enter the concrete arena of two genders, several urgent additional questions appear in this almost-too-simple account of the necessity of utopian political thought.

### 3. UTOPIA IN GENDER RELATIONS

I read literary feminist utopias. Dreams of liberated reproduction stand obstinately in the foreground. Children grow on trees, being a mother is a matter of collective welfare without biological limitations, freedom from domination is guaranteed (there are no masters of destruction), female cultures thrive in sensuous abundance. Borders and walls alone bear witness to the existence of another world, proof that liberation has not been possible for all humankind.

Whereas in these novels the walls are supposed to prevent the onslaught of

the unfree, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 it appears that those who were formerly locked up have access to the utopia of the promised land of the West. Capitalism as utopia? In the general confusion attending the collapse of 'actually existing' socialism, it seemed necessary to make a rush for the good life. Yet women still seem to be at a loss on both sides of the former borders. How is it possible that the 'realization' of utopia in 'actually existing' socialism and the more recent 'realization' of capitalism could end in a double defeat of the female sex? Where did the desire for liberation lead to, and where will it end up?

Let us begin the other way around. Can feminist utopia gain anything from the collapse of the old 'actually existing' socialist utopia? Dealing with such questions is difficult because our thoughts must execute complicated leaps: moving backwards and forwards between the critique of the botched reforms of 'actually existing' socialism and the critique of both its and capitalism's blindness as regards gender relations.

Nationalization, by focusing on the abolition of the ownership of the means of production, caused other forms of domination to become invisible. The expression 'command-administrative' tried to capture the impossibility of liberation in a system of production and administration in which decisions were imposed from above on the desires of the subordinated. But this expression contains no criticism of the maleness of such a system, nor does its implicit utopia point to the emancipation of women. Yet in the collapse of this system some images become visible. They point to a more radical and all-inclusive political utopia. We can learn from this.

The fate of women in the transition from 'patriarchal-administrative' socialism to capitalist conditions is in many ways characteristic. As Westerners we know what awaits women in our own society; and we also knew that the position of women in the other system was no worse than ours, rather they possessed confident expectations for the future. Women were, for example, economically independent of male providers, and there was also a cultural climate that was decidedly less sexist than ours. When we now realize that in the general chaos patriarchal patterns are taking root again in the East, we complain about the lack of a resistant feminist utopia. Yet writers in the GDR articulated far-reaching feminist plans – Irmtraud Morgner, Christa Wolf, Monika Maron, Helga Königsdorf, just to name a few. Why was there then no widespread feminism, or too little thereof?

#### 4. FEMINISM AND UTOPIA

It is time for me to better define my understanding of feminism: it represents a complicated and specific stand-point, yet at the same time it includes a universal human perspective. The feminist point of view questions equating humankind in general with maleness, and it challenges the assumption that the particularity of the female means that the female is naturally separated from the rest of humankind. Nevertheless, a new perspective which includes both sexes can only be formulated taking this ascribed particularity into account, because

false universalism has to be disproved and replaced by a real universalism. In this way feminism becomes a transcendent political utopia which also leaves its traces in the here and now.

My claim is this: one of the effects of the development of 'patriarchal-administrative' socialism was to make the equation of humankind with 'man' invisible in such a way that socialist perspectives not only were reduced to 'it is fulfilled', but also concealed the narrow-mindedness of such an equation. The wreckage of 'actually existing' socialism also unveils this aspect of domination in the 'not-yet'.

The system perished not only due to economic problems but also due to a lack of democracy. Initiative began to flag. Another sign of decline was the decay and dilapidation of the cities and the fact that ecological problems had assumed alarming proportions. Many share this criticism. From a feminist perspective I query whether all of these problems are not simply the necessary corollary of patriarchal structures and whether the continuous reproduction of these structures can be prevented by anything other than the liberation of women. Universal tutelage begins with the justification of tutelage over women. This is part and parcel of societies whose ruling principle is the ever more efficient production of the means of life, and not the humanization of life, rather than ones for which such economism would be a means to an end, but not an end in itself. This reversal of priorities has caused damage to humans and their natural surroundings for which brigades of repairers are desperately needed. But an ecological response that merely reverses such economism would mean a government that made decisions so that the earth could be protected for generations to come, but also a continued tutelage over women so that they were willing to selflessly care for human beings and their environment without thought of personal gain or wage benefits.

Although Marxist utopian thought intended to 'resurrect the body', to unfold the senses, to reach the highest level of individuality, to revoke the state, and to create a human-to-human relationship which was to be made visible in the relations between the sexes, this intention was reduced to a concrete analysis of domination. In *Capital* Marx saw how the former money-owner, now a capitalist, striding towards the factory 'smirks self-importantly and is intent on business' as Marx aptly described it; and behind him the worker, who only owns his capacity to work, is 'timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning.'<sup>3</sup> Yet Marx was here only observing the work-place outside of the home, otherwise he would have noted that the procession was not over at this point and that behind the worker, off to one side, stood his wife, carrying the household shopping, a baby on her arm.<sup>4</sup> And we have also to add the fact that behind the smiling capitalist stands *his* wife as a cultural creation whose bodily existence lets him forget his own bodiliness to the extent that in his focus on growth and profits he can be indifferent to life.

Even those who adopted a socialist perspective in the labour movement after Marx did not put all human beings and the care of their offspring and future

in the foreground. In so far as women were worth a political effort, this only involved making them similar to men, improving their efficiency and performance and including them in gainful employment. Industrialization of the household was the most progressive maxim; later an attempt was made to improve house-work with technical appliances and to demand the substitution of state-run organizations for the household so that women could combine career and family. This entailed not only representing and administering women, it spoke from the male point of view and from the perspective of industrialized production when considering women's work and women's lives. Just as the husband reluctantly does a few chores in the household, in the same manner industrialization of the household was conceived as taking care of a duty, not as humanization. The dream of a humankind that is loving, that acts in solidarity with one another, and that is creative and sensual, disappears in the effective fulfilment of the necessary. There is no time for anything above and beyond this.

It is clearly not enough just to pull women out of the domains in which they do the unrecognized and unrewarded work of keeping us human in order to make possible such a one-dimensional productive world – all of society like a single factory. It would be equally senseless to look for a solution to the problems of humankind merely by merging the gender roles. In their limitation to one gender each both men and women are deficient. A utopia that sees itself as feminist aims at the abolition of 'genders', just as a socialist utopia would hope for an abolition of classes. On the individual level this means that feminine human beings must experience themselves first as humans before they can relate as women to others; culturally it means destroying the whole network of gendering which cuts across our societies; and structurally, it would then be time to join the diverse interests, represented at present by the single genders and which are usually seen as separate domains, in such a way that social, ecological, and cultural development becomes the goal and not an unlikely by-product. This is the only possible transformational work – and at the same time the only kind of work indispensable for our survival – that requires utopian thinking. For this reason utopia enters the realm of reality. It can only be formulated through a feminism that is both resistance and at the same time, a pursuit of happiness. 'Between the deadly end of history and the utopically-visualized end of the humanity's prehistory stands the necessity of interventionary thinking/acting that is militant-optimistic, that critiques ideology yet is utopian, that is conscious and willed, that is realistic yet hopes for the possible, and that is anti-capitalist/anti-patriarchal.'<sup>5</sup>

##### 5. LACK OF UTOPIA: MEMORY OF THE FUTURE

'Heretics/Witches: encourage humans not to let themselves fall into the movement of catastrophe, but to give their individual life shape in the chaos, and to confront the chaos with this shape day by day.'<sup>6</sup>

The case for feminist-utopian thinking collides with the reality of contemporary disillusionment. A threat that long seemed speculative has now arrived: commodity society and its restrictions have corroded the capacity for dreaming and conceiving of utopia.

Let us remember where we came from, where we intend to go, and who we are. Justice is one thing for which we long: for this we need solidarity; and the greatest thing of all, joy, requires love. Our wishes are not immodest, yet still they shrink in the course of our lives, appear too great; the conditions for reaching them appear unachievable, and our own interventions hard to conceive. Who are we as women, who should be responsible for love and solidarity, that we have so little power to accomplish and assert these goals?

Renouncing our wishes, cutting them back to a degree of mediocrity, and resignation, are poor companions for necessary and desirable interventions. What good does the spirit of utopia do us today? Can we place hope in the power of anticipatory wishes? How great is our disappointment over the worsening reality that mocks such wishes as mere dreams when they are just beginning to be envisioned.

I have tried as a teacher to encourage students to envision their own utopias. The result: the wishes that they expressed went no further than hoping that the most urgent problems of their everyday lives could be solved. Kindergartens, a functioning and inexpensive public transportation system, enough affordable apartments – it is as if, in the absence of social democracy for over a decade, social democratic reforms have taken the place of utopias. What remains is the fact that even the ability to conceive of something utopian has to be relearned. A possible means of remembering the future is reading literary utopias. Let us take a second look.

## 6. FEMINIST-UTOPIAN LITERATURE

Instead of giving an overview of several feminist utopias, I will explain and theorize just one, in order to sharpen our thoughts and stimulate our fantasies. In this way I would like to suggest a ‘utopian project’ which I have named *Joy and Justice*, and which should be understood as both utopia and relevant to the here and now. I will be dealing with the novel *He, She and It* (1997) by the American author Marge Piercy. I will be concentrating on the role of the future, the past, and of women; in addition to this I will consider gender relations as relations of production.

### *The Future*

I do not enjoy reading science-fiction novels in which the development of computers is linearly and fantastically extrapolated: they usually end up being dystopias, or stories about the inhumanity of technology and the perfecting of domination and control. There is no way out. In addition to this, they often confirm my ‘feminine’ prejudice that home must be found in the ‘natural’ and not in the ‘technical’. In this way Piercy’s book has somewhat of a shock effect.

It is the year 2059. Due to a terrorist assault the accumulated human arsenal of weapons has exploded. The earth is almost entirely devastated and contaminated. Twenty-three corporations ('multis') have divided up the rest of the earth and share several satellites that afford artificial living-spaces. These are air-conditioned and protected and are only inhabited by technical experts who are in charge of running the place and furthering the development of the multis. The rest of humankind, as far as it still exists, vegetates and works in the contaminated zones. The companies' satellites are completely computerized and controlled, right down to the design of humans, who are not only all subjugated to the same culture of business but who also are made to look alike, as well as be as fit and youthful as possible, through surgical intervention. Gender relations are organized differently than today. Both sexes have the same jobs and the way in which one reproduces is up to the individual: that is, they can opt for test-tube babies or women can decide to carry through with a pregnancy. Espionage, ruthless competition, and crime prevail in the struggle between the multis.

#### *The Past*

One of the contrasting scenarios in the novel is of the survivors of the Jewish ghetto in Prague. Piercy travels back to the end of the sixteenth century and tells the story of the constant persecution, imprisonment, and expulsion of the Jews and of the wishes and dreams of many, and of the wisdom of a few. The way the story is told begins to change. The short bytes of the computer language are left behind and we come to the stuff of myths and legends and the dream that humans will some day be able to create other humans that possess much-needed and sought-after abilities. This is of course a male dream, in which the twenty-first century is directly linked to the sixteenth: a creature of spirit and earth, combined and formed in the right way, could be entrusted with the most important duties, could solve the most urgent problems, and could relieve suffering. The wise man of the twenty-first century is an engineer, the oldest in this modern earthly ghetto which is organized in a seemingly socialist way. He adapts to the expansionist drive of the multis by producing software for them. His ancestor in the Prague ghetto was able to create a Golem who possessed extraordinary physical strength; the engineer of the twenty-first century has constructed a Cyborg that is similar to a human being but is unlimited in his ability to learn and in his thirst for knowledge, who needs no sleep and is so intelligent that he can protect the community single-handedly. Juxtaposing a history of the future after ecological catastrophe and the consummation of the microelectronics age to the history of the Jews in Prague has a strange effect. The past becomes familiar, and in this way so does the future.

*The spirit of utopia, so we gather from the story, gains its strength from the 'not-yet' of the past, both in relation to the unfulfilled desires of the past, and in relation to the domination that began then. Its vision of the future includes the memory of the costs of human experience in the past as a historical force that must enter our consciousness.*

*Gender Relations*

Piercy's point of view is feminist. In this way she can uncompromisingly link the development of humankind to the history of patriarchy. It is one of her encouraging strengths that she neither displays patriarchy as something purely evil nor pretends it doesn't exist; rather she portrays it as a solution to the problems of regulating life in a community which has now arrived at a catastrophic finish. The wise Maharal of the sixteenth century created a Golem who, with his extraordinary strength, was able to fend off enemies like a 'one man army'. In the twenty-first century a Cyborg needs extraordinary intelligence. At the same time, the inventor fulfils his wish, as a father, to have a son who, unlike his real one, has not fallen prey to the realm of illusions but, having no needs of his own has only one desire, that is to learn and accumulate abstract knowledge. The same intelligence that brought forth these inventions finally becomes flesh and blood. In order to be accepted and recognized as human (which is necessary in order to serve as a guardian), the Cyborg needs social virtues. Piercy lets a woman appear on the scene who is the engineer's equal, and who, in addition to the abstract masculine virtues, programmes the Cyborg with a bit of feminine 'confusion' for good measure. She teaches the Cyborg to love and to focus his eagerness to learn as emphatically on human beings as on abstract knowledge.

*A necessary dimension of any dream of liberation must be the overturning of patriarchy. In Piercy's novel the solution to this problem is even somewhat humorous because she combines the one-sidedness of the sexes in such a way that the original goals are subverted. The child of masculine rational omniscience and the already-realized domination of technology becomes irrational thanks to feminine technological prowess; the price technology has to pay in order to fulfil its goal is its own demise. The logic of pure technical domination needs to be overcome. Competence combined with equal rights for both sexes, the preservation of a certain difference, and the skilful combination of both will make this possible.*

*Women*

Three women are central figures in Piercy's novel: the grandmother, the mother and the daughter. Each of them is entwined in societal chores, each is sensual in her own way, each lives under different conditions. All three are unbelievably competent and qualified, so that they can invest their energies with enthusiasm; without some sort of activity they would most likely lose their sense of purpose. All three actively resist the power of the multis in different ways. The grandmother builds security systems and develops the much-needed software which is the small commune's primary export product. The mother, a name for her that is so inappropriate that it constantly causes one to rethink what mothers are, is an 'information pirate', or hacker. She is a much sought-after criminal, because she frees information from private ownership and makes it available to the general population – for example the formulae of medicines, etc. In an unusual way the daughter represents romantic love, the longing for

a family, and in doing so develops a project, out of love for a Cyborg, that makes it impossible for machines to be created with emotions.

*An indispensable element of feminist utopias appears to be that positive female figures populate the society: women who are not merely role models, who are not merely active, interventionist, clever, attractive and strong, but women who also take on the dreams and longings that we have today, and live them and fuse them together, so that we can imagine ourselves in these figures.*

### *Relations of Production*

Piercy's novel is poetic and theoretically consistent. Domination, control and profit are the goals of the multis, armed with an apparatus of knowledge. The competitive logic of capital has apparently come to an end and yet capital continues to determine the lives of those who have jobs in accordance with the goals of profit – everyone else is human garbage, organized in anarchic, murderous gangs and at the mercy of the ecologically devastated earth. In this way the novel plays out the victory of neoliberal politics to its disastrous conclusion. Even on this destroyed earth there are signs of resistance. But since the old patterns of gender relations are used in order to achieve domination (for example the form of marriage with the possibility of allowing a company to raise one's child) liberation is not possible until both sexes unite their respective strengths as equals.

*The present is not devalued in favour of a fictional future; rather the author makes it possible to extract something useful from everyday life. The various and overlapping systems of dominance, as well as the continuing desire of humans for love and justice over several centuries, are made visible. The strength of this literary utopia is, last but not least, the loving and passionate attitude of the author to the world. In this way history and future become present, old-age can be deciphered as experience and wisdom, and the different and the common are deciphered as a force with which our dreams can be transformed into interventionary praxis.*

## 7. POLITICS FOR A NEW GENDER CONTRACT

Finally, I will attempt to anchor the utopian in 'realpolitik'. For this I have chosen the politically discredited liberal concept of the contract. My claim, but also my hope, is that when both sexes begin to view critically the relations in which they live, they will also realize that not only their own, but that all social relations, need to be urgently changed. This sentence assumes the following: (1) that in the dynamic of gender relations lies the possibility of change breaking out; (2) that changes in the relations of production and in the relations between the sexes are worth striving for from the point of view of both sexes; (3) that a revolt in the societal and political landscape is, after all, imaginable.

Since the market seems to have become the only instrument that has universal validity for regulating global society, and since this development has caused a continuous weakening of politics and the welfare state, at least in the western industrial countries, the theorem of the social contract, like the idea of

the contract in general, gains relevance once again. The discourse of the social contract refers to the sphere of the political, that is, to the assumption that under conditions of conflicting interests a good society requires consensus, compromises and concessions on the part of its members. The focus on the market does not exclude the idea of a social contract; on the contrary, market and exchange are based on contracts freely made between those who deal on the market. The idea of the contract is liberal and seems to work best when the contract partners are understood as free individuals. But those contracts which in the course of the last decade have entered into a state of crisis are collective contracts, namely those between generations, between labour and capital, between present and future and, finally, between the sexes. In so far as a social contract cannot be articulated in neoliberal thinking, this is the moral deficit of the neoliberal project.

The struggle surrounding the social contract, despite its conservative flavour, contains dimensions of disobedience and resistance. This will certainly become clear when labour and other movements which defend the welfare state are strengthened by incorporating the problem of gender relations – although doing so will also cause them problems. For it is incontrovertible that the genders are locked in a contract embodied in both material and cultural practices. Gender relations today are essentially based on a kind of division of labour, allocating to each separate competencies and responsibilities in society; in the current state of unrest, these relations can be modernized and become a putative solution for socially-produced contradictions. On the one hand the so-called ‘house-wife’ of Western Europe seems, since the 1970s, to have made way for more dynamic models resulting from women’s demands for employment and autonomy. On the other hand these shifts seem to have remained rather superficial because the general consensus is that increasing unemployment should be accepted without significant protest and in large part at the expense of women. In Germany at least, the word ‘double earner’ is used in connection with the refusal of jobs to women who already have a husband who has one. Not only does the resistance to quotas (also a form of contract) for women in politics, economics and science remain stubborn, but, conversely, the fight for quotas is weakened by a general cultural consensus that we have more important, more existential problems. And in the deregulation undertaken by all western governments for the purpose of improving national competitiveness – otherwise known as the dismantling of the welfare state – it is, as we have already said, silently assumed that in the ensuing social calamities, the nurturing figures of unemployed women will turn up to take care of children, youth, the elderly, the handicapped, the sick, the unemployed, the mentally disabled, etc., etc. Against all probability, the hope and consensus remains that women have such a sense of responsibility for the living and that they can and should honour it. To the extent that women continue to submit themselves to this without any significant resistance, they contribute to accepting as a humanly tenable social project the current practice of subordinating society to the economic imperatives of a tiny minority.

Under a new gender contract the social project would have to be discussed anew in order to reap the present from utopia. I don't imagine that division of labour contracts will be concluded, nor that gender relations are ready for reinvention, but rather that current gender relations, because they help to block a change in a social order striving for profits and unsustainable growth, will be put back on the public agenda. It is first of all a question of concluding a contract with the future, of making the question of the next generation – the reproduction of the human species and the problem of how and under what conditions the next generation should grow up – into a political question. What the next generation will be like is extremely important for civil society, since that generation represents not only the far off future but is already part of the present. The responsibility for the coming generation, as in the current domestic division of labour, should under no circumstances be left to women, since the latter can in no way bear such responsibility. This is so because in the last analysis this responsibility comprises questions of education, nutrition, the environment, resources, and city planning, etc. We can concretise the problem by equating it to all questions of the political and economic which are now regulated in ways that are largely incompatible with the future of humankind. Cancelling the existing gender contract in which women are absurdly made responsible for the future, although they in no way have the requisite competence or power, does not mean that they should simply be fitted into the wage labour sector, with equal entitlements, leaving undone all unpaid, voluntary, and neglected work. After us the flood. It means rather really taking over these responsibilities and conquering the corresponding domains of power and competence in order to do so. What we now need is another division of power and labour that must negotiate another vision of society, set new priorities and situate the genders in a different way. It seems to me indisputable that men must take part in attaining this different goal. This would be just the beginning of a humane society.

Public discussions which could take place practically everywhere should be utilized as a learning process so that a general plan for a society in which it would be worth living would be made more concrete, with the addition of realistic and individual demands. A good beginning would be to come to an agreement about socially necessary work, which must include the care of offspring, and for this reason also the environment as one of the living conditions of future generations. In any case it would be a society that was politically different, with different priorities which, as we know from earlier utopias, would hold the mirror up to the current state of things with inventive and socially critical intentions.

The concept of the contract would be useful in more ways than one. In a socially critical sense it is a utopian perspective which admonishes current politics. If we radicalize and sharpen current problems by including gender relations in our critique in a fundamental way, there appears on the horizon a society that distinguishes itself completely in its goals and in negating everyday domination.

The essential criteria of regulation would no longer be profit and growth but rather priorities that dealt with our present and future life, and with the reproduction of the species, that is, with questions of the future. The way time is used becomes an essential question, although the concept of ‘usage’ loses its utilitarian content and becomes a question of the quality of life. The division of labour becomes a question of justice and variety. It would be senseless to turn all work, including domestic work, into wage labour; instead we should separate all work from income. The possibility that in a society in which everyone works there would be still be those who could not support themselves, becomes unthinkable. Quotas, which used to be a political aim, would become a perfectly natural premise of a society in which the decoupling of work and income would be internalized by its members and would lose its dogmatic character. On this basis it becomes possible to envision a society which is both a women’s project and a utopia. There are enough sources of inspiration. In current ‘realpolitik’ the concept of the social contract becomes a form of compromise and of state intervention. In the vision advanced here, there would be quotas for women in every area of work, and quotas for men in areas of reproduction and social work – including the right of both sexes to work and take part in politics, as well as to the education and training needed to be able to do both.

Since every previous analysis has assumed that the sexes have differing standpoints and positions in society, and that gender relations are intertwined with the relations of production, we must also assume that the sexes are collective actors that must consensually negotiate a new social contract. In doing so both sexes may have to win and lose some things in order for the society as a whole to survive. The negotiating of such contracts, the struggles and the planning would politicize the public sphere. But this need not mean a tug-of-war between the sexes. The current crisis needs to be discussed in such a way that the fact that current social relations – in this case relations between the sexes – are complicit in the unsustainable conditions that have led to it becomes obvious – just as obvious as both sexes’ potential for participating actively in the remaking of society. The prerequisite is that we realize that we actually live in a patriarchal capitalism which has now even made survival into a private affair. This is what needs to be turned from standing on its head back on to its feet – and this would be feminist utopia.

## NOTES

1. Woolf (1938: 143)
2. Bloch (1953: 27)
3. Marx (1977: 280)
4. See Hartsock (1983: 234)
5. Barbara Holland-Cunz (1988: 12)
6. Irmtraud Morgner (1988: 154)

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