

**THE ANALYSIS OF LABOR RELATIONS IN “THE WORLD IS STILL YOUNG”:
DIALOGUES BETWEEN DOMENICO DE MASI AND MARIA SERENA PALIERI**

**UMA ANÁLISE DAS RELAÇÕES DE TRABALHO EM “O MUNDO AINDA É JOVEM”:
DIÁLOGOS ENTRE DOMENICO DE MASI E MARIA SERENA PALIERI**

**UN ANÁLISIS DE LAS RELACIONES LABORALES “EN EL MUNDO AÚN JOVEN”:
DIÁLOGOS ENTRE DOMENICO DE MASI Y MARIA SERENA PALIERI**



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ABSTRACT: We aim to provide a critical review of the issue of labor relations as presented in the work of the Italian sociologist Domenico de Masi. Titled *The World Is Still Young*, the book addresses problems related to our current society and its constant and turbulent progress. Divided into ten chapters, the author, through the inquiries of journalist Maria Serena Palieri, discusses themes related to this problem and its perspectives for the future. Masi has made significant contributions through his works to our understanding of the context of work in the world and the world of work. Let us examine, through this author, what we can do to try to change this reality, based on an understanding and critique of this work, which we analyze through a sociological lens.

KEYWORDS: Work. Future. Project. Leisure. Society.

RESUMO: Procuramos fazer uma resenha crítica sobre a questão das relações de trabalho inseridas na obra do sociólogo italiano Domenico de Masi. Intitulada *O mundo ainda é jovem*, que trata de problemas relativos à nossa sociedade atual e seu constante e conturbado progresso. Neste livro, dividido em dez capítulos, o escritor debate através das indagações da jornalista Maria Serena Palieri, temas relativos à essa problemática e das suas perspectivas para o futuro. Masi deixou através de suas obras grandes contribuições para entendermos melhor a contextualidade do trabalho no mundo e do mundo do trabalho. Vejamos por este autor o que podemos fazer para tentar mudar essa realidade, a partir da compreensão e da crítica deste trabalho que analisamos através de uma visão sociológica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Trabalho. Futuro. Projeto. Ócio. Sociedade.

RESUMEN: Nuestro objetivo es ofrecer una revisión crítica de la problemática de las relaciones laborales tal como se presenta en la obra del sociólogo italiano Domenico de Masi. Titulado *El mundo aún es joven*, el libro aborda problemas relacionados con nuestra sociedad actual y su constante y turbulento progreso. Dividido en diez capítulos, el autor, a través de las indagaciones de la periodista Maria Serena Palieri, aborda temas relacionados con esta problemática y sus perspectivas de futuro. Masi ha realizado importantes contribuciones con su obra a nuestra comprensión del contexto laboral en el mundo y del mundo del trabajo. Examinemos, a través de este autor, qué podemos hacer para intentar cambiar esta realidad, basándonos en la comprensión y crítica de su obra, que analizamos desde una perspectiva sociológica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Trabajo. Futuro. Proyecto. Ocio. Sociedad.

The world is still young: conversations on the near future with Maria Serena Palieri

In this dialogue between Masi and Palieri (2019), several lessons can be drawn, beginning with the author's assertion that our lives encompass two distinct realities corresponding to two irrefutable certainties: first, that the world in which we live is certainly not the best of all possible worlds; and second, that even so, it is the best world that has existed to date. The author is likely referring, among other aspects, to the industrial and post-industrial worlds. The former compelled people to live around factories and work, whereas the latter allows for flexibility and leisure that should be meaningfully embraced. In addition, the text advances the idea that humanity's creative endeavor is only beginning its trajectory and that, for the first time in history, it is up to us either to interrupt it or to allow it to continue. From the outset, one can identify an underlying optimism, accompanied by a series of warnings issued by Masi—an optimism grounded in reason. Thus, this thought-provoking text is divided into ten sections that address issues related to work and progress. It concludes with a warning about the risks of neo-fascism, the emergence of new threats from a dangerous far right, and the spread of authoritarianisms worldwide.

The first chapter, entitled *Disorientation and Project*, offers an analysis of the disorientation characteristic of our present time. For this sociologist, disorientation is closely related to complexity, as we constantly alternate across all spheres of existence between phases of reassuring security and unsettling phases of disorientation, such as those experienced in markets and labor relations. It is not sufficient merely to understand mechanisms and systems; rather, it is necessary to construct an ideal-typical model, a project that enables us to anticipate, interpret, and act within this reality. For De Masi (2019), the absence of such a model leads directly to disorientation. He identifies individuals' disorientation in the face of technological advancement, arguing that human beings are caught in a paradox: on the one hand, technology expands access to knowledge resources; on the other, it generates insecurity regarding future stages of technological progress, fostering uncertainty about what lies ahead for our world. Masi (2019) emphasizes that we live amid constant challenges and questions who should be responsible for developing a new model of life capable of guiding more sensible progress for all.

The following chapter, *Longevity and Old Age*, analyzes the increase in life expectancy alongside the challenges this development poses, arguing that the contemporary world is nevertheless better than in previous eras. The subsequent chapter addresses *Androgyny and Genders*, focusing on a series of challenges and inequalities that must be overcome in the future.

According to this sociologist, the reduction of working hours brings couples closer together and diminishes disparities, as men increasingly share domestic responsibilities and childcare, as well as other activities previously stigmatized by gender. For Masi, a more equitable division of labor in the broader social world would lead to a fairer distribution of tasks within families and everyday life.

In the fourth section of the book, the author addresses a crucial and central issue in his analysis, as it stems from the conflicts and disorientation of the post-industrial period. Long ago, Masi (2000) identified that society was transitioning from an industrial society to a knowledge-based society. This shift would promote two aspects that are now of paramount importance to individuals and organizations: flexibility and adaptability to change. Today, it is no longer necessary to be physically present in an industrial setting to work; tasks can be performed remotely, saving time and costs while demanding greater specialization. Whereas physical strength and discipline were once considered essential job requirements, intellectual capacity and creativity are now more highly valued.

The discussion then turns to *Digital and Analog*, in which the author argues that contemporary society is divided into a dichotomy that is naturally moving toward the extinction of one of its components. From his perspective, the analog generation will, through the natural passage of time, give way to a new form of society whose members are fully embedded in the digital era. This raises a critical question regarding how such a digital future should be designed. De Masi (2019) does not view this transition as catastrophic, as it may bring certain benefits to the world. However, these benefits can only materialize if they are collectively debated and planned. Here, the notion of democracy is clearly evident in the author's arguments.

Finally, the author addresses his central theme: work and leisure. This aspect of his work has long been recognized (Masi, 2000) and highlights not only changes in labor relations but also the essential role of creativity in contemporary society. It is important to note that the concept of leisure invoked here differs from that of earlier centuries, when it was often condemned—sometimes even by religious doctrines—as synonymous with laziness. In Masi's (2000) framework, leisure is time that should be actively used and possesses a revolutionary and creative character. For this sociologist, there exists an ethics of leisure that functions when individuals work without seeking advantages for themselves that would harm others. Leisure should enable people to live happily while respecting and not harming those around them.

It is worth recalling that throughout his work Masi (2000; 2019) consistently criticized what he calls the "cult of work," something deliberately constructed and embedded in modern

Western culture. The author identifies a conception of work as an intrinsic virtue, understood as a good and an end in itself. For Masi (2000), however, work should be regarded as a means of producing the goods and services necessary to achieve a certain standard of living, with equitable distribution across society. The true ends of economic production, therefore, should be consumption and leisure, rather than work and production themselves. Work should thus function as a source of personal satisfaction and self-realization.

Masi (2019) argues that technological advancement can help humanity free itself from excessive work and make greater use of free time, a process he refers to as the economy of leisure. Creative leisure would emerge from a drastic reduction in working hours. Yet, despite these new technologies, we continue to work as if we were factory workers in a model inherited from past centuries, with fixed schedules for arrival, departure, and meals, as well as company-imposed targets, all within a rigid bureaucratic regime.

In the chapter entitled *Fear and Courage*, Masi addresses contemporary anxieties and the need for debate concerning reality and perception. According to the author, we tend to believe that novelty lies in perception, whereas in fact the opposite occurs. To address the anguish of contemporary society, it is necessary to understand the distinction between objective reality and perceived reality. Masi (2019) then turns to *Engagement and Egoism* and continues his sociological inquiry in *Classes and Individuals*, where he revisits Marxist concepts within a post-industrial society in which factories are no longer the primary drivers of the economy. In the final two chapters, *Intelligence and Feelings* and *Happiness and Lightness*, the author's optimism becomes evident. The latter offers an extended reflection on happiness in human understanding, traced across different societies.

Domenico De Masi made significant contributions to social thought, most notably the concept of Creative Leisure (2000), as discussed in this text, which challenges the notion that free time is inherently negative and instead emphasizes its potential to stimulate personal creativity. He also exerted considerable influence on the creation of Italy's Five Star Movement (2000), a political party that sought to place ordinary citizens in positions of power rather than relying on traditional political parties. In this context, he advocated for direct democracy and viewed social networks as an ideal tool for facilitating such change.

A close reading of the book reveals that, despite the many problems facing contemporary society, the author maintains an optimism of reason, grounded in the belief that human societies are capable of confronting and overcoming challenges across multiple domains. These challenges begin with labor relations within a new context—no longer an

industrial society, but a knowledge-based one. This shift requires greater creativity and a more effective use of our time, enabling us to live better lives. The author's ideas can thus be taken as a valuable framework for reflection and informed action.

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