

**French Pragmatic Sociology:**

**A Materialist Renewal of Critical Theory**

[Communication for the XVIII International Association World congress](#)

[Yokoham, Japan](#)

***Bruno Frère***

[\*Do not quote without authorization of the author\*](#)

Introduction: The Centrality of Social Class

Numerous authors confirm the importance of Luc Boltanski's writings. In his various studies, he diagnoses the centrality of social inequalities, notably of the fundamental inequality between social classes, insisting that they need to be taken seriously by sociology (Boltanski, 2008: 134; 2009: 222). In the 21st century, this inequality is no longer that separating the bourgeois class from the working class. Rather, it concerns a fundamental division in society. On one side, there is a small class of individuals who succeed in dealing with the ordeals imposed by the 'new spirit of capitalism': mobile, adaptable, flexible, creative, and [full of leadership,]driven? they are capable of [getting plugged in the multiple projects of a company]? for which they become a vital link and where they sometimes earn a high salary. On the other side, there is an unmoving class, that of unemployed people and those with precarious low status jobs (Boltanski, 1999: 308-313). This class is characterized by a lack of identity and an erratic relation to employment.

As Robert Castel explains, since the 1990s this category of people 'disaffiliated [of]from? wage society' has grown. Today it constitutes a secondary market consisting of unemployed people and permanent temporary workers who can be hired by companies on an *ad hoc* basis. This category of precarious labour is made up of 'supernumerary' and 'useless' people, who do not even have the chance to be [exploited]employed? by a company, and are alienated by repetitive and monotonous work. They are deprived of long-term work prospects and are compelled to accept 'half-wage', 'fractioned-wage', and – especially – 'low-paid work' situations. These forms of

employment, characterized as ‘atypical’ (fixed-term contract, temporary work, part-time job, insertion, odd jobs, internships, etc.), are widespread.<sup>1</sup> A more or less regulated wage system is still the dominant form of work organization. Yet in recent decades we have witnessed rapid degradation of the wage condition towards a ‘below’ of traditional employment (traditionally characterized as made to last for an indefinite period), which does not benefit from the full complement of labour law prerogatives or social protection (Castel, 2007: 416-418).

This widely shared observation lies at the heart of perennial contemporary criticism, a critique which everybody thought had been buried with ‘the end of ideologies’ proclaimed in the 1980s, but which has seen a renewal in France through several summarizing attempts (Renault and Sintomer, 2003; Keucheyan, 2010; Corcuff, 2013). The fact remains that, eager to join the movement, this paper [falls within the will to highlight the social and political emergency of the redeployment of criticism].subscribes to the renewal? Its purpose, however, is to overcome the impasse in which the two main traditions of critical theory in Europe seem to systematically drive it : the current of the Frankfurt School (Renault and Sintomer, 2003; Keucheyan, 2010), and that associated with Bourdieu’s critical sociology (Corcuff, 2013).

If these two traditions, probably amongst the most influential to have shaped the initial Marxist critical project with the aim of redesigning it, are to be considered together, it is precisely because – they have always shared a certain form of idealism, or at least a certain form of transcendentalism, which begins to decline under the influence of Luc Boltanski’s work. Indeed, in this chapter I would like to demonstrate that most critical ways of thinking do not share the belief in the existence of a fundamental anthropological substrate of which ‘man’ may have been deprived in modern society (notably, due to capitalist alienation, reification, instrumental reason, or doxic illusions induced by habitus).

From Lukács to Bourdieu, many significant intellectual developments have taken place and, in fact, one may gain the impression that the critical tradition continues to be based on one key assumption: individuals (workers, social actors, etc.) unconsciously reproduce the social structures of capitalism whilst being alienated by them. They accept the conditions enforced on them and no longer seek to rebel against a system which impoverishes not only their work and culture, but also their [soul]problematic? and creativity. The situation may be even more diree: they ensure the reproduction of the system by seeking to engage in mass consumption at any cost, or by glorifying the dominant values.

In this chapter I would like to show that toay, no critical perspective has emerged out of a negative representation of the world such is likely to introduce ‘man’ living here and now as something other than a deeply bastardized being, corrupted, denatured, perverted, inflected, soiled by a civilizing process which owes its perversion to modernity (Rousseau) on the one hand, and to capitalism on the other. As we shall see, without making an exception, Honneth has rightly noted that all the authors of the tradition of what he calls ‘social philosophy’ have remained dependent on a form of disgust regarding the world as it is.

Yet for me as a sociologist of social movements, it seems difficult to deal with such a [software]? of the new forms of social resistance to domination (*Indignados*, anonymous, alternative economy, movements of the ‘-less’ – see Frère and Jacquemain, 2013), even though it is precisely the same kind of diagnosis adopted by a significant number of theories dealing with cooperation and association. Some amongst them leave me sceptical, notably when it comes to the shared desire to [locate,]posit? for instance, an alternative and [solidary]? economy in the field of utopia, as opposed to a succinct and time-honoured representation of Marxism (Pessin, 2001; Pradès, 2012; Hély and Moulévrier, 2013), or to subscribe to the 'natural' reciprocity of human beings as they lived before the arrival of capitalist modernity, , thus before the ideology of growth perverted human imagination (Godbout, 2000). is this right?

In my opinion, in order to be able to talk about contemporary reactions of resistance against diverse forms of alienation and domination authorized by contemporary [connectionist]? capitalism, a philosophical representation of the passive, unconscious human reified by this very same domination, which only a few holy utopian thinkers would avoid, remains ineffective. This is because, in the case of such a representation, the modern subject will be likely to react when criticism will have taken away that layer of impurity specific to the condition of alienated man in order to allow him to renew his deep nature, the one which was his in the context of the ‘good life’ , as Habermas and Honneth would say . Yet abolishing the very possibility of transcendentalism and idealism which lies implicit in contemporary critical theories, whether French or German, opens the door to the possibility, in the incertitude of the social model that they may create, of an actual – but profane – criticism of capitalisme. Here, it is a matter of human relationships in the world that gives criticism its content, in all their insurmountable impurity, in all their contingency. Aiming at abolishing the transcendental anthropological foundations that criticism has always allowed itself, this gesture is currently silhouetted not in philosophy but, rather, in a sociology, that is, ‘pragmatic sociology’. Parallel to the classical Marxist tradition traversing Bourdieu’s critical sociology and the intellectual tradition of the Frankfurt School, it is a form of ‘critical materialism’ that I would like to exhume in this chapter, a notion inspired by the libertarian Marxism of Lefort and Castoriadis (see Frère, 2009), which is able to make the profane capacities of people’s emancipation emerge . I would like to do so on the basis of a reflection revolving around the pragmatic perspective which has recently been reinforced in France by Boltanski in his book *De la critique* (2009), but which stands – in my view – as the backdrop of all his works.

## 1. Criticism from Frankfurt to Paris

. Figureheads of critical Marxism from the 1930s until today, the main authors of the Frankfurt School were the first to criticize the consumer society. The philosophy and sociology of culture presented by Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer rests upon the anthropology of an entirely alienated Man, deprived of autonomy, unable to think, and immersed in a society where the dictum of consumption prevails. Mainly inspired by Marx (alienation), and Freud (the unconscious and psychological repression), Marcuse shows the distinction between true and false needs:

'Resting, having fun, acting, and consuming in compliance with advertisements, loving and hating what others love and hate, these are – for the most part – fake needs. Such

needs have a function and a social content that are determined by external forces over which the individual does not have any control; their development and satisfaction are heteronomous [...]. In the last analysis, the individuals themselves must answer the question regarding *true and false needs*, but only as a last analysis, that is to say *when they are free* to give their own answer. As long as they *are indoctrinated and conditioned* (even when it comes to the instincts), the answer they give to that question cannot be considered as their own [...]. Any release implies that one becomes aware of servitude and this awareness is disturbed by the satisfactions of (false) dominating needs that the individual has made his own. Any release implies that the fake conscience of consumption is replaced by a true conscience freed from the false one<sup>ii</sup>. Freely selecting amongst a variety of goods and services is not being free if it implies that social controls must weigh on a laborious and anxious life – if it implies that one must be *alienated*. And if the individual spontaneously reiterates imposed needs, it does not mean he is autonomous, it only proves that the controls are efficient.' (Marcuse, 1968 [1964]: 30-33; italics added; my translation)

According to Marcuse, release can only come from the artist's or the philosopher's work as soon as he has extracted himself from the instrumental action. The rationality specific to art, the ability to represent existence, to define yet unachieved evolutions, must elude the order of technological domination and rationalization: 'instead of being at the service of the established device through the setting up of things (for instance by [accepting work in advertising]), is this right? art must become a skill which helps destroy its things' (1968 [1964]: 263; my translation). Similarly, the philosopher must be the one who helps renew 'with an non-mutilated reality', which 'instead of contributing to confine the mind into the mutilated universe of ordinary discourse', places itself at an 'extra-linguistic level' in order to find a 'genuine meaning' for things below the 'illusory meaning' we give to the world by employing 'the terms used in advertising, movies, politicians' speeches or best-sellers' (1968 [1964]: 223, 221, 217).

Adorno and Horkheimer say something similar when they allude to the way modern man strives to 'turn himself into a device in accordance with the model presented by cultural society [until in his deepest emotions]'? Indeed, 'men's most intimate reactions towards themselves have been reified<sup>iii</sup> to the point that the idea of their specificity survives only in its most abstract form: for them, personality no longer means white teeth, the absence of sweat marks under the arms, non-emotionalism', owning the latest SUV or fashionable smartphone. And there you have the consequence of the triumph of advertising in industrial society: consumers themselves are compelled to become what cultural goods are [i.e. interchangeable things]' (1974 [1944]: 176; my translation).

The alienation from objects that he dominates is not the only result of man's domination:

'With the reification of the spirit, relationships between men (and a man's relationship with himself) are bewitched, so to speak. The etiolated individual becomes the meeting point of conventional reactions and behaviours (of consumers) that are expected from him [...]. Industrialism turns a man's soul into a thing. Waiting for absolute scheduling, the economic device confers, from itself, a value to the goods that will decide men's

behaviours.' (1974 [1944]: 44; my translation).

It would be erroneous to think that reifying mass social phenomena is nothing but a matter of class, our authors maintaining that it encompasses both dominant and dominated in the same way. Actually, dominants are no more aware of it than the dominated. But it serves their interests. This state of affairs is radically veiled by the rise of living standards among the lower classes noticed by theoreticians from Frankfurt to the United States in the 1940s. However, Adorno and Horkheimer add, this material improvement remains insignificant on the social level (1974 [1944]: 17). Even if being hungry and cold becomes less widespread, the working classes remain committed to certain forms of real social, cultural, and economic precariousness, which arguably justify the rebellion. Yet the desire for consumption, which resides deep inside man's [soul,] prevents the consciousness of that rebellion from occurring. Mass sociocultural phenomena, Marcuse would have continued, implies an ideology that aims at [covering]obscuring? the class struggle:

'If the worker and his boss watch the same television programme, if the secretary dresses as well as her employer's daughter, if a black man owns a Cadillac, if they all read the same newspaper, that assimilation does not indicate the disappearance of classes. On the contrary, it indicates the extent to which dominated classes participate in the needs and satisfactions which ensure the dominance of the leading classes.' (1968 [1964]: 33; my translation)

They are all trapped in false consciousness which benefits only a few.

The idea that the dominated reproduce and participate in the conditions of their own domination is at the heart of the French critical school whose figurehead is Bourdieu. If a link had to be established with the cultural approach of the Frankfurt School, we may quote *La distinction*: 'It is certainly on the field of culture that the members of the dominated classes are the least likely to discover their objective interest, to produce and impose the problems in compliance with their interests: indeed, the consciousness of cultural dispossession varies [...] [oppositely] in contradistinction? to cultural dispossession. There is no hierarchical relation which does not claim some legitimacy from what is acknowledged of it by the dominated themselves' (1979: 452; my translation).

Moreover, Bourdieu openly acknowledges the inspiration that he draws from the Frankfurt School and especially from Adorno:

'What the relation to mass cultural products reproduces, revives, and reinforces is not only the alienation of office work, but also the social relation which is at the foundations of the worker's (or popular) experience of the world and which makes work and products of work, *opus proprium* (owned piece of work), present themselves before the worker as *opus alienum* (alienated piece of work). Dispossession is never entirely unknown, rather it is tacitly known, as when, with the progress of automation, economic dispossession is combined with cultural dispossession, which gives economic dispossession its best apparent justification. Because they do not possess the incorporated cultural capital which is the condition for the adequate appropriation (according to the legitimate definition) of

the objectified cultural capital in technical objects, ordinary workers are dominated by the machines and the instruments that they serve more than they use, and by those who hold the legitimate, that is to say theoretical, means to dominate them.' (1979: 450-451; my translation)<sup>iv</sup>

In other words, if mass culture (Hollywood, reality television, advertising, etc.) impose themselves so massively and unconsciously, it is because the dominated do not dispose of cultural capital which would allow them not only to distinguish themselves in relation to this ideology, but also to produce it to their advantage, as the dominant do.

It is, as Bourdieu would argue in other texts, the height of dispossession, of symbolic violence:

'Symbolic violence is that form of violence which is exerted on a social agent with their complicity [...]. Social agents are knowing agents who, even when they are submitted to determinism, contribute to produce the efficiency of what determines them [...]. And it is almost always in the adjustments between the determiners and the categories of perception which constitute them as such that the domination effect emerges [...]. I name misreading the fact of acknowledging a violence which is precisely exerted to the extent that we are unaware of it as violence; it is through the fact of accepting this set of pre-reflexive fundamental presuppositions that social agents engage by the mere fact of taking the world for granted, that is to say as it is, and consider it natural because they apply to it cognitive structures which come from the very structures of this world [...]. The analysis of the doxic acceptance of the world, as a result of the immediate harmony of objective and cognitive structures, is the true foundation of a realistic theory of domination and politics. Of all forms of clandestine persuasion, the most inevitable is the one imposed by the order of things.' (1992: 142-143; my translation)

On the epistemological level, Bourdieu will early define sociology as a discipline which, above all else, must reveal the set of all those pre-reflexive presuppositions and denounce this doxic acceptance of the established order as it is often defended by common sense in ordinary language. He perceives the sociologist's task as that of the intellectual who will pay attention not to 'consecrate the obvious facts of common sense instead of condemning them'. (1973: 78)

Therefore, the individual who rationalizes his act of consumption (for instance, the purchase of a gleaming SUV) in terms of freedom, choice, or selection, only mobilizes the pre-reflexive presupposition or the stereotype of 'freedom' in order to justify his act of purchase through his ordinary language. And the sociologist who would commit to this illusory freedom in order to develop a sociology of consumption would do nothing but become contaminated by a petrified philosophy of the social, rather than assigning a sociological explanation to that very same act. The first thing he should have done is to bid farewell to this ordinary explanation inherent to common sense, and to examine how this act is nothing but the product of dominant forms and modes of representation inscribed in a 'petit bourgeois' habitus. Ordinary language remains 'subordinated to practical functions', the ones that their habitus assigns to them. This is how, in the manner of the first-generation Frankfurt theoreticians, Bourdieu indicates in *La distinction* that dominant modes of consumption serve as a model for the modes of consumption of the dominated, through their habitus, even though the latter are unaware of it. The petit bourgeois is the parvenu whose acts convey the unconscious desire to

symbolize tactlessly a social success and to ape the real practices of the dominant (who would probably object to expressing their domination through possession, considered vulgar and ostentatious, of an SUV). Even though they form an oppositional tandem which Bourdieu aspires to get rid of, it seems that the use of the conscious/unconscious distinction – which he constantly evokes – is revealing.

Habitus ‘is a system of sustainable and transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is to say as generating and organizing principles of practice and representation which can be objectively adapted to their purpose without supposing the conscious aim of ending, and the express control of operations necessary to reach them’ (1980: 88; my translation).

The justification that one is likely to make for their practice, therefore, comes as an additional element in relation to their real motives that are located beneath a habitus which can only be updated by the sociologist.

The only effective reality is beneath the illusory reality over which our habitus, as structuring structures, weaves a desk blotter. ‘Social science must reintroduce into its exhaustive definition of the object, the first representations of the object (namely that of common sense which sees the SUV object as the embodiment of a freedom), which it first had to destroy in order to conquer the objective definition’ (1980: 233; my translation).

But it only does so when it is protected from ‘summary and schematic representations’ from ‘ordinary language syntax’ which emerge from the habitus (with Wacquant, Loïc 1993: 28 and 36). Common sense (and its language)] must, therefore, be subjected perpetually to sociological suspicion and to arouse a will of ‘critical rupture with its tangible evidences indisputable at first sight, which are actually made to give an illusory representation of all appearances of a foundation in reality’ (1997: 217; my translation).

Ordinary consciousness is the reifying consciousness, Marcuse’s fake consciousness, alienated by the unconscious game of the habitus.

Bourdieu will never compromise on the core of his epistemology. One may reckon that he will soften his position, notably in his best-seller *La misère du monde*. But never will he withdraw from the conviction that ‘rigorous knowledge almost always implies a more or less radiant rupture [...] with the evidences of common sense, usually identified to good sense’. Sociology must question ‘all [pre-constructions]? and presuppositions’ to which it may be exposed and that are ‘the product of social agents which do not have all the answers about what they are and what they do’ (1993: 1413). What laypersons mostly do not understand are, of course, the tacit rules that govern their practices with impunity from an unwitting habitus.

Bourdieu’s fiercest opponents understood it well: By inviting us, in the manner of Marcuse, to a continued asceticism toward common-sense language, Bourdieu is willing to demonstrate that ‘rationality can only be defined as a fight, which must be restarted over and over again, against the pre-scientific mentality and the misleading evidence’ (Latour, 1989: 12; my translation).

Scientific sociological language is that which exists *before* being possibly contaminated by a common sense against which it must be protected. It is *below* schematic and summary prejudices and representations which betray our habitus and common sense that the sociologist must dig in order to establish the true meaning of social facts, inevitably other than that which is given by the authors of these very same facts. Bourdieu’s sociology is a thought from the

depths: correct language is that of the sociologist when it has not yet been contaminated by this stratum of dirtiness made of prejudices which are a constant threat to it. Sociological language is, so to speak, 'below' ordinary language. Below the rationality (alienated and reified by the habitus) expressed conscientiously by common sense, Bourdieu considers rationality – still free – as able to unveil the unconscious practical rationality of the actor. The Bourdieusian sociologist would be closest to that free rationality, a rationality which is itself free from all myths, presuppositions, and received ideas.

The habitus, the individualized social, as he likes to remind [it] us? is the condition of any practice or logic, no matter their mutual interaction or permeation. The habitus covers this 'free' anthropological substrate of Man and only the Bourdieusian sociologist can dig deep enough to find it. And in a society where dominant ideology belongs to liberalism and consumerism, it is no surprise that what the sociologist shows are habitus which will lead those who bear them to reproduce consumerist behaviours while looking to justify them by judgements mobilizing, for instance, stereotypes of freedom entirely soaked with dominant connotations conveyed by the words (I am free to consume, purchase, express my pride of owning such and such a brand or SUV). Ultimately, Bourdieu's will is to see the dawn of a critical thought, which, consonant with the first Frankfurt School, strives to distinguish the forces which determine the illusions emerging in common language under the pressure of dominant ideology and its structures of thought, in order to prevent it from contaminating that of sociological research. As with Marcuse, Adorno, or Horkheimer, the intellectual is the man of true consciousness, the consciousness of depths.

Yet things have not changed with the second Frankfurt School. As Vandenberghe rightly points out, Habermas was no more interested in the present of emancipation than Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, or Bourdieu. Rather, he was concerned with what was there *before* alienation. In this sense, Vandenberghe suggests, Habermas replaces 'the transcendental subject of philosophy' with 'the transcendental language of pure communication' (1998: 260). That language, spread between members of an ideal community, is being polluted, soiled, and the whole task is, therefore, to take back the rationalization of the life world as an oriented process of progressive verbalization whose vanishing point is constituted by the re-advent of the ideal communication community (1981, t2: 120 and 8). This task is exactly the same as the one that Bourdieu assigns to the sociologist who must rediscover the anthropological substrate, free of all myths and presuppositions of the habitus.

Even though he distances himself from phenomenology through the intervention of ethnomethodological criticism, in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas develops a similar account, which rests entirely upon a transcendental ideal whose ethnomethodology had precisely succeeded in getting rid of phenomenology. Likewise, on that subject, Ricœur and Castoriadis notice in Habermas the utopia of an 'ideal situation of language' which restrains the 'social' to a quite metaphysical inter-subjectivity of substantial individuals (Ricoeur, 1995: 205 and 330; Castoriadis, 1990: 83). Simmelian sociologists have demonstrated that in the Habermasian approach, every conflict is temporary and it should always be possible to find a rational solution on the basis of logical reasons. (Hahn, 1990, p. 385; my translation). Is this a quote?

Rather than turning away from the classical idealism of German philosophy of history, Habermas returns to it wholeheartedly. His task seems to have been to give a name (communication) to the anthropological substrate, a name previously undiscovered by Adorno and Horkheimer, who evoke simply that the task of philosophy is to look for it.

Within the Frankfurt' School tradition, what is currently seen as a problem with Habermas, namely, the ideal



speech situation, which is not colonized by the state or by capitalism, is what stimulates Honneth's reflection. He will lucidly note this Habermasian idealism in his mentor's work, [rises with]? the first 'social philosophies', amongst which Rousseau's theory of 'The Social Contract' holds a prominent place. In *La société du mépris* (2006 [2001]), Honneth considers that those philosophies are all characterized by a specific conception of the 'good life', which would be endlessly violated by the truncated social evolutions of modernity. 'Therefore, what he calls social philosophy has, from the start, assigned to itself the task of diagnosing, amongst social development processes, those that represent a hindrance to members of society and to reduce their ability to have a good life' (2006 [2001]: 41; my translation).

But as I show elsewhere, even though it may seem surprising, he is not opposed to it (Frère, 2014 [forthcoming]<sup>vi</sup>). Honneth's own theory of reification falls precisely within the resumption of the project which aims to point out the existence of a pure practice of inter-subjective communication (which will become recognition) within which individuals in modern society have not yet become things, objects for each other.

## 2. A Materialist Perspective: Luc Boltanski's Critical and Pragmatic Sociology

In one of his last texts, Boltanski gets to grips with the tradition of critical thought in order to give it a new orientation. To him, what is at stake, as has been the case since Marx, remains to develop a theory that can contribute to de-construct domination. [This]what? is attributable to dominant classes, namely those who escape precariousness (or the risk of precariousness) whose definition was given in the introduction. The concept of 'domination', as Boltanski explains in *De la critique*, targets 'the field of the *determination of what is* (from the French '*ce qui est*'), that is to say, the [one]? in which is established the relation between what may be called, borrowing the term from Wittgenstein, the symbolic forms and the state of things. 'One may say as well, in a language inspired by law, that the criticism of domination relates to the establishment of characterizations, that is to say [...] the operations which inextricably fix the properties of beings and determine their value. This work of characterization generally leans on formats or types, most of the time associated with descriptions and/or definitions, which are themselves stocked in diverse forms such as regulations, codes, customs, rituals, tales, etc.' (2009: 26; my translation).

It is the task of institutions, Boltanski continues, to define reality, to *say what is*. Indeed, no real individual can affirm that they have the necessary authority to define *the state of what is* (from the French '*ce qu'il en est de ce qui est*') for the simple and good reason that he has a body. He is, therefore, necessarily located in space and time, and is thus likely to be accused of expressing only his point of view, an interpretation of reality. Consequently, the task of saying what is must be delegated to *bodiless beings*: institutions. It is the institutions that will precisely enact regulations, codes, and rituals which will then enable us to talk about reality. And it is thanks to these regulations, codes, and rituals enacted and protected by beings who *do* have a body (the judge, the policeman, civil servants, European Commissioners, etc.), that *bodiless beings*, such as the State or capitalism, for example, manage to fall within reality. To mention an example developed in another recent work, *La condition fœtale*, abortion is an emblematic case because it is involved in the fundamental problem of defining what a human being is. The State is entrusted with the very delicate task of turning a being from a state of thing into that of a person. He must, therefore, go through the

categorization of the medical world (filled with beings with a body such as doctors, etc.) who will begin to identify gametes, pre-embryo, embryo, foetus, viable foetus (etc.), so to give this being an ontological status likely to turn into a legal status (2004: 178).

'[In the case of capitalism, institutional operations are just as necessary to define the properties of things], what transforms them into products or goods and makes the establishment of markets possible. In order for supply and demand to meet and for a market to be established and work (more or less), the information on goods must indeed be focused in the prices. But for that process itself to be actually possible, the goods must previously have been the subject of a work of definition, or rather, that the relations between the goods and the names they have been given have been stabilized by a defined description. It is such a task of fixation of references that brands, and, more generally, institutions of normalization ensure (ISO norms, for instance), which prevent objects from losing their identity in the course of the multiple uses to which they are submitted. All these institutions ensure, as in the case of wine, '*appellation contrôlée*'.' (2009: 120; my translation)

As one may guess, in our democratic social-liberal societies, law plays a key role in the process of stabilization of reality, without which we would live in permanent anxiety, unable to share [about ] what?the world and things that surround us that are perpetually changing.

'[Law contributes to make reality] both intelligible and predictable, by [preforming]performing? chains of causality likely to be activated to interpret the events that occur. Since law has to establish links between events and entities, it must dispose of an encyclopaedia of entities that it acknowledges as valid. It is its responsibility [...] to say the state of what is and to associate these judgements regarding the being with judgements of value. This is the reason why law can only be produced by institutions – mostly depending, in contemporary societies, on the States – and, conversely, that any device likely to produce law can be considered as an institution. In that sense, we may say that law is at the same time a semantic instance, in the sense that it fixes characterizations, and the ontological operator par excellence [...]. Legal institutions always comprise representatives, people in charge or spokespeople who are physical persons, ordinary individuals endowed with their own bodies, who can represent these entities, speak on their behalf.' (2012: 322; my translation)

However, capitalism and the State are naturally not the only *bodiless beings* that enact the symbolic forms of reality, unlike the Frankfurt School's theory of reification has implied for a long time. There is, depending on cultures and societies, a significant number of *bodiless beings* as, for instance, churches, political parties, ethnic groups, ancestors, etc. University may be considered one of them as well. Therefore, for instance, the definition of a doctoral seminar is more or less defined symbolically by the kind of institution the university is, which, in its own way, is likely to be embodied in *beings with body* in order to say *the state of what is*. It forces its members to respect a set of tacit

norms and regulations in compliance with a situation. But a complaint may rise, in case the *state of things* of the seminar would not match adequately the idea that one may have about its form. The professor dreams, the doctoral student making a presentation mumbles, students sleep, chat, or play with their iPhone. The complainant in the audience might, on behalf of the institution, get up and ask: ‘that is what you call a seminar’? Such a statement ‘aims at pointing out the fact that the state of things, here and now, does not deserve to be designated by the symbolic form (seminar)’ (2009: 113) – even though the being with a body, the professor, had said at the beginning of the year that his seminar was one of the most scholarly and scientific.

It is thus the task of the institutions, strictly speaking, to institute reality so that everyone agrees on what they are talking about or on the situation in which they live. [They]institutions? have a semantic role, which is necessary for someone to be able to represent and refer to a common world. In that common world, we live in a routine most of the time.

'It is only when hitches do not enable the routine that the institutional aspect of the institution gets the upper hand. Moreover, the institutions themselves must constantly be the object of a process of re-institutionalization, if they do not want to lose their contours and, somehow, be unmade. During these processes of repair, actors or some of them – usually those who consider that they are endowed with authority – strive to restore the presence (invented) of the bodiless being by reminding us that we must act in compliance with the forms, so that its dilution can be slowed down.' (2009: 124; my translation)

This is, for instance, the case when the Head of the Department or the Laboratory Manager, once he got wind of the (above-mentioned) professor’s mistake during his own seminar, calls him to order. It is also the case when, for example, an entrepreneur is convicted by the Court for ‘unfair competition on the market’ because he employed workers unofficially. It is another reason why processes of ritualization are crucial to institutions. They enable us to be constantly reminded that reality is what it is and that we should not worry about the perfect juxtaposition between symbolic forms and the state of things. In this way, for example, a student’s parent will actually *feel* for his graduated child, during an official diploma presentation , in front of a group of gowned professors. However, if one or some of them come to the presentation wearing a pair of jeans and sports shoes, a little tipsy because of an alcoholic lunch, doubt and worry may emerge: are these people really professors? Are we actually at a diploma presentation ? If we really are, should my son or daughter's achievement be taken seriously?

In order for us to avoid permanent incertitude, institutions constantly need confirmation devices that are able to select from the continuous flow of what happens, what *is*, and to [keep it as *being*]*maintain*? in spite of the passage of time. In other words, these devices, established by bodily representatives of institutions, need to consolidate what is while confirming what *is* (in a certain context) in all possible worlds, or, so to speak, *sub specie aeternitatis*. In order to confirm reality or at least that it really is what institutions say it is, these devices make it undergo ‘tests of truth’.

These tests ‘endeavour to deploy in a stylized way, aiming at coherence and saturation, a certain pre-established state of the relation between symbolic forms and the state of things in order de re-confirm it endlessly [...]. Here, repetition plays an essential part [...]. Its only role is to make us see that there is a norm by somehow deploying it for itself’ (2009: 157; my translation).

In this way, if we go back to the above-mentioned example of the diploma presentation, we may consider it as a device of confirmation aiming to repeat every year the same kind of tests, which will mobilize the same objects (official document, gowns, hats, university emblem, etc.), and aim at affirming, on the one hand, that we are in a real ceremony and that, on the other hand, many people in the room *actually* embody, from that moment on, what they have been trained to be (a doctor, an architect, etc.). And this is achieved by the simple performative decree of the university institution which *actually* has the power to enthrone them. Now, getting back to our economic example, all the controls companies go through which are carried out by work inspectors seeking to unearth unofficial work may also be considered as a set of devices of confirmation. Here it is not only about the State ensuring that welfare costs and other taxes are actually paid by the employer for all of his workers, but it is also about repeating that the world we live in conforms to capitalism, of which one of the fundamental norms shaping business reality is free and fair competition. Competition is a norm which, by the way, has percolated down into the common representation of the world and what we consider to be real that we would all contemplate calling into question the validity of a test which, in case we are facing a doped competitor or two competitors that have cooperated in order to win, crowns them, although their ‘cheating’ is obvious. Within a competitive world, instances of confirmation must constantly remind us of the founding, individualistic, and liberal norms so that reality, soaked with unilateral meanings, can be interpreted in only one way.

‘By covering with the same semantic fabric all the states of things whose representation is staged, confirmation produces an effect of closure, of necessity – which satisfies the expectations of truth and even saturates them. Devices of confirmation play a role of maintenance regarding reality. Their effect, when they succeed, is not only to make people accept reality but also to make them love it’ (2009: 159; my translation).

What must be pointed out here is the radical contingency of the social world that Luc Boltanski intends to highlight. To this day, critical theory, whether Bourdieu’s, that of the first Frankfurt School (Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer), or the second (Habermas, Honneth) has always returned to a transcendental plane of guaranteed stability (philosophical or sociological freedom, communication, recognition, etc.), which enables it to consider the construction of a common world, which is then immediately reified. [Besides, it is why one must acknowledge Honneth’s relevant intuition to have indicated in that transcendentalism a new declination of the Rousseauist pacified state of nature, which will open the way to social philosophy.]. If there is an original position in *De la critique*, it is that of a radical uncertainty about reality, on what it *is*, and what is valuable about it. It is the task of institutions to give points of reference which enable the reading of a social situation so that individuals can coordinate their actions while gaining the impression that [it] stands by its own strength.

Institutions format reality, which detaches from a background in which it cannot be re-absorbed. This background is called *le monde* (the world) by Boltanski (2009: 93). Drawing inspiration from Wittgenstein again, he defines that world as being *everything that happens*. Through its tests and characterizations, reality wants to establish some permanency in this ever-changing world by choosing in that world [what is *worth* for it] what is valuable in it? (for instance, the object ‘Powerpoint projector’ could be mobilized in a seminar, but the humorous comic book that can be found in a student’s school bag could not).

‘Unlike reality which is often the object of tables (notably statistics) affirming an [overhang]? authority, the world is the exact immanency; what all of us are caught up in, glued in, as we are immersed in the flow of life, but without necessarily accessing the register of language,

even less of deliberated action, the experience which takes root in it.' (2009: 94; my translation)

The world is filled with beings that can , depending on their pertinence within a given situation, be either ignored, or rejected or re-characterized and integrated to reality in order to confirm it. In short, reality consists of elements torn away from the world and it will put them through its tests of truth by means of categorizations, characterizations, and totalization.

Thanks to its devices of confirmation, social reality manages to make us think that it is robust and to make the actors interiorize their powerlessness to change the format of tests. To rephrase this with the vocabulary of *La justification* (1991: 58 and 192), reality is robust or *stands* when instruments of totalization, representation, and categorization (financial, [managing]management? or political statistics) of what is and what is given as relevant for the collective seem able to cover entirely the current factual or even virtual field (2009: 61-62).[ Thus we can conclude that reality is robust or stands either when no event suddenly appears in the public space with a relief sufficient to question the pre-established harmony between reality and the staging of reality, or when such an event is inappropriate, or if it is invisible. ]?

But a reality entirely submissive to a semantics stabilized by the institutions would make the action impossible. This is the reason why reality always contains the possibility of criticism. Institutional language is never in a position to prevent the eventuality that the actors engage in misconduct and in divergent interpretations of *what happens*. 'Indeed, instruments, categorizations, and devices that aim at constructing, organizing, and confirming reality] are fragile because criticism can always draw on the world of events which contradict its logic and procure ingredients to unveil its arbitrary aspect' (2009: 143 and 95; my translation).

The texture of reality can, therefore, be questioned because a reflexive moment emerges, and raises the question of how to characterize what happens (example: 'that is what you call a seminar?' or 'this crumpled, hand-written, grease-stained paper is what you call a contract of employment?').

### 3. Thinking New Social Movements

There is, however, another type of test that takes us into the very heart of the renewal of critical theory currently carried out in francophone pragmatic sociology. It is the *existential criticisms* or tests that Boltanski sometimes characterizes as 'radical'.

'Existential criticism is that which manages to formulate itself and make itself public, to unveil the incompleteness of reality and even its contingency by drawing in the flow of life examples likely to make its foundations unsteady and to question it, so as to confront it with the inexhaustible reserve which cannot be totalized – the world' (2009: 170; my translation).

Here criticism is materialist because it draws its strength in a [building world ]?rather than in the abstraction of the life world (Habermas), or in a state of nature intellectually purified below what constitutes our daily life. The life world is the concrete world of *experiences lived here and now* without any [background. ]?‘Existential tests are tests of something, even if in their case what is felt has not been the object of an official characterization, even of an explicit characterization likely to incorporate them in normative formats that support reality’ (2009: 171; my translation). Something in the world seeks to be accomplished but is vexed by the institutions which prevent it from happening, which triggers a form of [satisfaction desire.]?thwarted satisfaction? There is already something other in the flow of life than what is shaped under the features of the reality that is given to us, and even if that something cannot be said in the languages of institutions, we may nonetheless be driven by the desire to see it come into being.

[Existential criticism, sensing, for its part, these other different things likely to be desired in the life world exist, concretely and materially puts to test the solidity of the equipment that structures reality, somehow in the way the Indignados tried to occupy Wall Street, key equipment of confirmation of the capitalist institution.]? We might also mention the self-managing experience of LIP in France when workers who expressed the desire to take over the production facilities abandoned by their owners, were denied, by means of judges and lawyers, the right to property and were not legally allowed to collectivize the purchase and management of such a facility. Reality resists with all its legal and normative weight. Besides, we can measure the real hazard of that attack against what [economy]? *is* against the rapidity with which the police evacuated the place in both cases: Indignados in Wall Street, and the workers in the LIP factory. As long as a demonstration disturbs only the average citizen, without undermining the devices of domination, that is, the devices of embodiment of reality, we may fear that the desire which presides over its organization goes unheeded (Frère, 2013).

What critical pragmatic sociology intends to do with ordinary people is to work with them to shape their practices and desires. But according to Boltanski, [if this about]? producing with the actors the theory of their practice, it must be done without actually endorsing those who, amongst their actions, consist in participating in reality *as it is* so that it can continue. It is rather about working with them to make their existential experiences visible and understandable, those which at one point are likely to draw (or desire) in the world what is needed to escape reality. This amounts to saying that, in this perspective, sociology must support people’s emancipation not simply by pointing out the devices of alienation and symbolic violence which they undergo, but also and above all by connecting the possibility of that emancipation to what *already* exists in their life. What sociology must constantly target is *the world*: the world as it [carries]contains? mute suffering but also desire. [That desire does not rest upon the ‘nothing’ of a perfect, pacified, idealized human nature (or upon a utopia to be fulfilled in the future), but upon the material content of a life experience already unfolding in the world as it is into *something* as emancipation.]?is this right? Not only is that emancipation impossible to translate through language and institutions, but it is often rejected and condemned by them (as was the case with the Indignados in Wall Street). These effective, concrete, material forms of life which are not characterized in this world have always existed, today mostly on less resistant lines (Frère, Jacquemain, 2013). We may think about the first couple of homosexuals who had the temerity to reveal their sexuality in public and who have often undergone the legal consequences. But today’s example, closer to us, would be all these initiatives of alternative and [solidarity economy]? which refuse to comply systematically with the local injunctions of economic institutions. Has a local exchange trading system (associations whose members trade goods and services with a fictive currency, therefore enabling the most deprived to participate) not been condemned in Ardèche for unfair competition? Do structures whose purpose is to support the development of associations and/or cooperatives not see their subsidy being questioned each year because, rather than devices of integration aiming at training the most precarious people to restart on the

‘conventional employment market’ (from which they are ejected again a few months later), they work, all in all, to empower them towards the creation of their own job in a collective dynamics<sup>vii</sup> ? For these structures, it is all about enabling the workers to regain the meaning of what they produce, to do an autonomous job (in the strictly Marxist sense of the term), in a context in which they are likely to be the owners of their production tools. These attempts are more difficult to implement than simple re-characterization, and do not fill the tables European Social Fund work programme statistics whose spokespeople threaten to cut the subsidies for not satisfying the ‘score’ of unemployed integration within the labour market (Frère, 2013).

We may also think about all these cooperatives of consumption such as community-supported agriculture which circumvent the controls of the French Health Products Safety Agency by directly getting their supply at the local farmer’s in order to avoid the stranglehold of [big box stores]wholesalers? on consumption. And we may again think about the ‘*casseurs de pubs*’ who take back privatized public spaces, about some Greenpeace actions which paralyse convoys of nuclear waste, about the undocumented migrants and the homeless who squat in empty accommodation without authorization. In short, we may think about all these groups which contest the boundaries of legality and often infringe them. According to Boltanski’s approach, these infringements are attempts at emancipation that have not waited for critical theory which maybe would not fail in its classical tradition to indicate that these are either only ‘*petites bourgeoises*’ infringements or attempts to renew an obscure (communicational, mutual, or other) human ideal. In the case of pragmatic theory, we might say that these attempts are ideal here and now. Even if they suffer from all the conceivable impurities, even if they must build themselves from the world which is as it is, beautiful and awful at the same time. [Even if there is the constant risk that an alternative economy may become a crutch of capitalism and have to compose with its own tools.] is this right? Even if there is the ghastly phenomena of domestic violence in homeless people’s squats. Even if someone who is, during the day, the coordinator of a community restaurant in Salvador (Bahia, Brazil) turns into a heroin dealer at night in order to survive.<sup>viii</sup> The world that Boltanski talks about is not the pure and clean world which precedes reification in critical tradition because it is immediately dirty and impure. Because it is composed of people as they are.

The critical theory discussed here, can and must take into account actors’ dissatisfaction explicitly in its work of theorization, in order to modify their relation to social reality and, in this way, social reality itself, in the sense of emancipation. [But it must do so while bearing in mind that this emancipation already finds elements of material fulfilment in the world *acted* by the actors and their desire but who have trouble reaching legitimacy and discursivity (‘that is what you call a cooperative? I call that poor people who help each other’ or ‘self-organized mutual assistance groups that compete with local SMEs’). ]??? What is the subject here?

‘The genre of criticism that pragmatic theory must make possible should, in the first place, unveil aspects of reality starting from the preoccupations and ordinary criticisms of the actors who are not satisfied by them in order to reformulate them clearly and make reality unacceptable’ (2009: 20; my translation). But it must also unveil the practices which, since their application in the world, mix with these aspects and change their contours. ‘The idea of a critical theory that would not be [leant against]? the experience of a collective and which would somehow exist for itself, that is to say for nobody, is shallow’ (2009: 21; my translation).

Sociology may help people get away from the tackiness of reality by suggesting that what they do and know they are doing is maybe busily stripping reality from its necessity. [To mention an example, the sociologist is not in a position to accuse the imperious necessity of a state of the consumerist world which has reified our cultural practices to

such an extent that we eventually find pleasurable, even beautiful the kilometres of advertising which flood our metro, bus stops, televisions (etc.)]???. The actors ('casseurs de pubs' and others) who daub the very same advertisements today, who desire and achieve another possible world, have not waited for Marcuse, Adorno, or Horkheimer. Indeed, for these actors, the lawsuit is never far away.

As soon as theoretical and, as it happens, sociological thought present itself as the 'main access road to the truth', as it were, most of the urban resources available as raw material become unavailable and arouse suspicion. [As to Habermas and Honneth, if they actually identify the actors' capacity and their reflexive skills (to show, for Honneth, the indignation of a possible deficiency of recognition from which they suffer), they do it on behalf of a communicational inter-subjective ideal which these latter lack and with which they have trouble to renew even if they want to.]??? The present world is vitiated when it comes to critical theories and the ideal world is, for its part, an unreachable 'below'.

*Critical theory*, in the pragmatic and materialist [declination]definition? defended here, gets rid of its pessimistic rags, deploying the misery of a social order reproducing itself. It does so by combining with the theory of the *critical actor*, at the core of Boltanski's work since *L'amour et la justice comme compétences* (1990: 37-78). For thirty years, what has made the pragmatic school in the field of francophone sociologies original has indeed been the gathering and summarizing of the criticism developed by people themselves during their daily activity, where they perform the social in an innovative way (2009: 30-31). Naturally, the actors may at any time also contribute to performing the world in the 'ugly' way, drawing in what Spinoza would have called sad passions (or desires) rather than happy passions (we may, for example, recall the recent murder of a young antifascist militant by skinheads in the middle of Paris). It is here that the reflexivity of the sociologist himself is alerted<sup>ix</sup>. Yet sociological reflexivity does not ever induce us to deny that of the actor whose conscience (or rather un-conscience)[ should be sent back around a dominant sociology always ready to appease the anxiety universally felt toward urbane effervescence by reminding that what is *is* and, furthermore, that is fine that this is so.]?? Here, the sociologist works to systematize common skill and breaks with the asymmetry that exists between the actors' beliefs' and the theoreticians' knowledge in critical sociology (1990: 63). Of course, the actors often turn a blind eye to the reality to which they contribute, but the sociologist does not deprive them of the possibility of opening their eyes (1990: 95). He gives them back their critical skill and, thereby, their capacity for action (1999: 548).

The concept of action itself is close from losing its meaning in the usual critical theories. Insofar as everything is already won [the first round]? in the first instance? towards a reification of practices or cultural dispossession, the notion of action which at least assumes that it is developed against a background of incertitude (that of the *world*) in a plurality of possible options disappears. In pragmatic critical theory, incertitude does not disappear even as it is very likely to be reabsorbed by tests of truth which will make it legible and understandable ('Ah X eventually let go of his self-managing utopia, he recovered *the sense of reality* and accepted a stable job at Carrefour'), it must not necessarily be this way.

People, of course, can find themselves in a position to adopt dominant values through the intermediary by which they are enslaved, by interiorizing them under the form of ideologies or habitus, sometimes going as far as to ardently desire what alienates them. In this respect, it may seem strange for a melancholic spirit to see the relentlessness with which some unemployed people strive to find a job, any job, as far as it enables them to reintegrate themselves into a sacrosanct employment market that has repeatedly signified that it does not want them by returning them to their



temporary work agencies. But it is these very same people and nobody else who, on the other hand, at other moments in their lives or in other contexts, will stand up against the terrifying power of that reality by giving new interpretations of them<sup>x</sup>.

Nevertheless, the more optimistic representation of the human offered by pragmatic sociology is not naïve.

'[It] knows that it is difficult to tear away from] the seriality and tackiness of reality [...] that discourages criticism and not – as is often said – the absence of project or alternative for the present situation. As is clearly shown by the social history of the workers movement, for instance, past rebellions have never waited for a detailed alternative based on the model of utopia – from which theories of association mentioned in the introduction gain their inspiration, [Editor's Note – to be presented to them to show themselves brilliantly.]?? Conversely, we may say that it is always from the rebellion that something like an alternative was able to emerge, and not the contrary.' (2009: 72; my translation)

Sociology can support all these attempts at displaying critical energy by helping them construct a stronger common ground – stronger because more collective – which will resist better the integration of the formats of reality before which they would all be individually more fragile. It does not start from a social world already made (alienated), in which any new being is ejected, then perverted, but from a social world *in the process of making itself*. In the first case, the emphasis will rather be placed on the constraints and strengths that weigh on the agents. In the second case, emphasis will rather be put on the creativity and interpretative capacities of the actors, who not only adapt to their environment but also seek to modify it. [The first ones]? proffer a negative image of the actor as almost necessarily passive (or whose potential activity is related to an unreachable ideal horizon), and erase the possibility of politics. They do not enable an understanding of how actors liberate themselves?, if only by establishing areas of temporary autonomy, inevitably local, and moreover, by coordinating their actions so as to question the necessity of social order. However, history, as well as the current life-world, shows many examples of that kind. 'By dint of seeing domination everywhere, we open the way to those who do not want to see any domination'. (2009: 79)

## Conclusion: The Upcoming Task of a Critical, Pragmatic, and Materialist Sociology

At a time when managing ideology, with its armada of specialists, technicians, and other experts, aims at confirming more than ever the reality of the world and of its necessity, even if it means making desirable what is supposed to occur anyway ('we do not have the choice, austerity cannot be avoided, public expenditure must be cut down, we must rationalize, renew with growth, work longer, for lower wages...'), in most of his recent texts (2008, 2009) Boltanski mentions how existential tests laboriously manage to be shared and to lead to demands. The effort to create or maintain margins of autonomy take the form of individual or small-group DIY. In order to reduce the

constraints that weigh on them, actors develop a specific interpretative skill aiming at identifying spaces of freedom by taking advantage of the flaws within the control devices. By doing so, they are often confronted with the limits of legal action. These ordinary people, who undergo the effects of domination (unemployed people from [solidarity]? and the alternative economy, undocumented migrants, homeless people, people without rights...) lose neither the correctness of their sense of justice, nor their freedom, nor the correctness of their interpretations as to what occurs in reality, nor their lucidity. But all these people are put in the impossible position of being unable to act (2009 p. 188, 2008, p. 152).

[Mixing sociological work and that of [their]? collectives, some derisory, is the condition of being able to identify in recent reality, reality as it is in all the daily comings and goings, which does not correspond to the way it is presented, and therefore, make the first step towards a movement aiming at finding grips to get out of this blinkered reality and seek to identify the other 'lateral possibles' that the world offers (2008: 88 and 178).]? The theoretical work of sociology may consist in identifying the way actions in the world have to do with each other, even though they are isolated in different situations where each undergoes the constraints of its reality (the owner's right in the case of squats, the standards of competition for the cooperatives of consumption, etc.). The cognitive tools that pragmatic perspectives provides must enable these actions to [come closer to] approximate? different properties [but to common urban substrate,]? a little like Lefort' and Castoriadis's group *Socialisme ou barbarie* once sought to do with the disparate actions of workers' collectives (Frère and Reinecke, 2011). In order to do so, however, the political role of sociology must be taken on and avoid being confined, for instance, to the moralism for which Fraser quite rightly reproaches Honneth (Keucheyan, 2010: 283), or in Bourdieu's intellectualism.

To borrow my closing statements from Latour, the world that we must seize again, through the intervention of its actions, does not stand as a second façade behind a first one, as a face behind a veil, as a human nature behind a denatured human, as a mystery behind its manifestations, as a truth behind a lie, an anthropological substrate behind a false consciousness or a habitus. 'These piles of successive blindfolds, all these veils accumulated one upon another like so many petticoats, keep looking in the same direction: they confirm it in the will to access the far away (past or future), to the ever more concealed. But it is not about looking towards the far away; neither is it about running through appearances to grasp through them the hidden truth, but it is about bringing back the look towards what is close, yes, towards the neighbour, towards the present which is still waiting to be seized back' (Latour, 2002: 121; my translation). The present world, its disaffiliated what?, its inequalities of class, its individualism, its consumerism, are all detestable things but at the same time, paradoxically, no world is preferable to this one since it is the only one we have. By definition, it is this *world* (in the very sense of Boltanski), accessible here and now by everybody under the instituted reality, that we must address, and in its own language. 'Waiting to be transported by some miracle to other times and places is lying and running' (2002: 183). 'For how many years, how many centuries have the professionals of speech, the revolutionaries or conservative counter-revolutionaries found themselves in a contemporary era which they did not loathe? Idols, materialism, market, modernism, masses, sex, democracy, they hate all of them. How would they have found the right words? They wanted to convince a world that they hated deep in their soul. They really believed that it would only be possible to talk about absolute revolution provided that, in the first place, populations are deported to other places and times, supposedly more spiritual' (2002: 206; my translation).

Referring to what exists, here and now, to the raw material of what lives in the *world* in terms of cooperation (still not perfect) and the transformation of reality (still incomplete), this is the task of materialism to which I assimilate pragmatic criticism. That very materialism can and must fall within the renewal of the Marxist thought which at first was a wonderful social realism rather than an [economism]? (as for instance Keucheyan, 2010: 119 and 125). But

maybe it should be given a libertarian reorientation, which I have tried to outline (Frère and Reinecke, 2011), and should be taken over since the renewal of critical theory developed above.

## References

- Bourdieu, Pierre (1979) *La distinction*, Paris: Minuit.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1980) *Le sens pratique*, Paris: Minuit.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1993) 'Comprendre', in Pierre Bourdieu (ed.) *La misère du monde*, Paris: Seuil, pp. 1389-1447.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1997) *Méditations pascaliennes*, Paris: Seuil.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, and Jean-Claude Passeron (1973) *Le métier de sociologue*, Paris: Mouton.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Loïc Wacquant (1993) *Réponses. Pour une anthropologie réflexive*, Paris: Seuil.
- Boltanski, Luc (1990) *L'amour et la justice comme conséquence*, Paris: Métailié.
- Boltanski, Luc (2004) *La condition fœtale. Une sociologie de l'engendrement et de l'avortement*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Boltanski, Luc (2008) *Rendre la réalité inacceptable*, Paris: Demopolis.
- Boltanski, Luc (2009) *De la critique. Précis de sociologie de l'émancipation*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Boltanski, Luc (2012) *Énigmes et complots : Une enquête à propos d'enquêtes*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Boltanski, Luc and Ève Chiapello (1999) *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Boltanski, Luc and Laurent Thévenot (1991) *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Castel, Robert (2007) 'Au-delà du salariat ou en deçà de l'emploi ? L'institutionnalisation du précaire', in Serge Paugam (ed.) *Repenser la solidarité*, Paris: PUF, pp. 415-433.
- Castoriadis, Cornélius (1990) 'Individu, société, rationalité, histoire', in Cornélius Castoriadis *Le monde morcelé. Les carrefours du labyrinthe III*, Paris: Seuil, pp. ??
- Corcuff, Philippe (2013) *Où est passé la critique sociale ?* Paris: La Découverte.
- Frère, Bruno (2009) 'Une nouvelle voie pour le matérialisme politique. Remarques sur l'anthropologie négative de Marx et l'anthropologie positive de Proudhon', *Revue du MAUSS*, 34, Paris, La Découverte, pp. 231-247. is this a book or a journal ?
- Frère, Bruno (2013) 'The Solidarity Economy: Emancipatory Action to Challenge Politics', in Raphaël Jozan, Tancredi Voiturier and Sanjivi Sundar (eds.) *Reducing Inequalities*, [TERI Press]: New Delhi, pp. 233-249. does the publisher's full name appear?

Frère, Bruno (ed.) (2014 [forthcoming]) *Le tournant de la critique* Paris: Desclée de Brouwer.

Frère, Bruno and Juliane Reinecke (2011) 'Libertarian socialism and solidarity economy', in Richard Hull, Jane Gibbon, Oana Branzei and Helen Haugh (eds.) *Dialogues in Critical Management Studies. Volume I, The Third Sector*, Bingley: Emerald, pp. 117-127.

Frère, Bruno and Marc Jacquemain (eds.) 2013 *Résister au quotidien ?*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Godbout, Jacques (2000) *L'esprit du don*, Paris: La Découverte.

Habermas, Jürgen (1987 [1981]) *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel. Volume II*, trans. Jean-Louis Schlegel, Paris: Fayard.

Hahn, Aloïs (1990) 'La sociologie du conflit' *Sociologie du travail* 32(3/90) : 375-385.

Hély, Matthieu and Pascale Moulévrier (2013) *L'économie sociale et solidaire de l'utopie aux pratiques*, Paris: La Dispute.

Honneth, Axel (2006 [2001]) *La société du mépris*, trans. Olivier Voirol, Paris: La Découverte.

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno (1974 [1944]) *La dialectique de la raison*, trans. Eliane Haufholz, Paris: Gallimard.

Keucheyan, Razmig (2010) *Hémisphère gauche. Une cartographie des nouvelles pensées critiques*, Paris: La Découverte.

Latour, Bruno (1989) *La science en action*, Paris: Gallimard.

Latour, Bruno (2002) *Jubiler*, Paris: La Découverte.

Marcuse, Herbert (1968 [1964]) *L'homme unidimensionnel*, trans. Monique Wittig, Paris: Minuit.

Pradès, Jacques (2012) *L'utopie réaliste. Le renouveau de l'expérience cooperative*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

Pessin, Alain (2001) *L'imaginaire utopique aujourd'hui*, Paris: PUF.

Renault, Emmanuel and Yves Sintomer (eds.) (2003) *Où en est la théorie critique ?* Paris: La Découverte.

Ricoeur, Paul (1995) *L'idéologie et l'utopie*, Paris: Seuil.

Vandenbergh, Frederic (1998) *Une histoire critique de la sociologie allemande. Volume II*, Paris: MAUSS / La Découverte.

## Notes

---

- <sup>i</sup> 74 % of the new contracts in 2006 (Castel, 2007).
- <sup>ii</sup> The notion of false needs will indeed be [adequately completed ]?by Marcuse via the idea of ‘false conscience’consciousness? opposed to [conscious] life or liberated [conscience,] which he expresses in reference to Hegel’s master and slave dialectics: ‘The slaves of advanced industrial civilization are sublimated slaves. However, they are slaves not because slavery can be defined either by obedience or by the harshness of labours, but by the status of instrument and man’s reduction to the state of [consented] “thing”’ ([1964]1968: 58).
- <sup>iii</sup> Reification is a concept expressed by Marx but really developed by Lukács which indicates, in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), ‘that man’s activity (whether he is a worker or a consumer) – in a completed market economy – objectifies itself in relation to him, and becomes a goods submitted to objectivity, stranger to men, and must carry out its movements just as independently from men as any goods designed for the satisfaction of [fake]? needs (through consumption) of the goods that have become mercantile things. In capitalism, human activity acquires the status of any goods, that is to say the status of merchandise. Merchandise fetishism (denounced by Marcuse) contaminates all the activity and human action spheres’ (Keucheyan: 226).
- <sup>iv</sup> How can we not hear, some thirty years apart, a clear echo of these lines of dialectic reason criticism: ‘The consumers are the workers and the employed people, the farmers and the petit bourgeois. Capitalist production encircles their body and soul, so much that, without opposing the least resistance, they are the prey for all that is offered to them. Just as the subdued people always took more seriously than their lords the lecture that came from these latter, just as fooled masses of today undergo, more strongly than those who succeeded, the myth of success. They desire what the other has and obstinately insist on the ideology through which they have been subdued’ (1974[1944]:142).
- <sup>v</sup> ‘More precisely, they do not necessarily have access to the principle of their discontent or unease and the most spontaneous declarations can, without intending to dissimulate, express something else than what they apparently say’.
- <sup>vi</sup> I do not have the space in this text, dedicated to French criticism, to develop this reflection about Habermas and Honneth. For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Frère (2014 [forthcoming]).
- <sup>vii</sup> We may think, for example ,of the initiatives of radical cooperatives [of]run by? REPAS (<http://www.researepas.free.fr/>).
- <sup>viii</sup> I borrow this remark from my friend and colleague Genauto França Philo, a professor in Salvador, whose realistic representation of solidarity and alternative economy has assisted me considerably.

---

<sup>ix</sup> I think, with P. Corcuff (2013: 96-97), that, in terms of critical theory, standing firm on a position of neutrality inspired from Weber as sociologists such as N. Heinrich intend to do from a relatively scientific position, is impossible. Sociologists choose their collectives more or less spontaneously in accordance with various and unconscious interests which are rarely based on science in the positivist sense.

<sup>x</sup> Here again, we are getting closer to the ontology of fragility that emerges from the social movements evoked (in much the same way as [here]in the current paper? ) by Corcuff. These movement [draw the possible]? because they are open to the 'maybe', a possibility which leaves significant room for ambivalence, imperfection, and incompleteness, but also for common coercions, analogical echoes, intersections...An ontology that moves aside from unit ontologies of the overview, purity, and perfection (2013: 280).