Back to materialism

Reflections on Marx’s labour, praxis, cooperative and libertarian socialism in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century

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Abstract:
From Marx to Althusser, the materialist approach has tended to assume that individuals (that is, workers, proletarians and other social actors), unconsciously reproduce the social structures of capitalism which alienate them. It is assumed that individuals accept the conditions forced upon them and no longer seek to rebel against a world which substantially impoverishes their labour, their spirit and their creativity. In this paper, I will try to show that by dint of favouring almost exclusively Marx's concept of alienation, there is a considerable risk that materialist thought will adopt only a negative path. Whilst I acknowledge Marx’s significance to materialism, I wish to argue that his stance should be combined with that of the anarchist and libertarian French thinker Proudhon. Proudhon has succeeded in presenting a conception of the worker as more than just alienated. Workers can also cooperate and experience a reciprocity seemingly at odds with the character of capitalism. Under Proudhon’s influence materialism takes a positive turn, enabling us to avoid falling into the utopianism that the theory of social economy employs to critique capitalism – a utopianism that renders its critique even less effective than that of Marx.

Key words: materialism, 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Proudhon, Marx, libertarian socialism, alienation, labour, emancipation, cooperative theory, social economy.
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Reflections on Marx’s labour, praxis, cooperative and libertarian socialism in the 19th century
Introduction: the alienated man

From Engels to Althusser, materialism in its main variation – the Marxist approach – has defined materialist thought. Individuals – that is, social actors such as workers and proletarians, – unconsciously reproduce the social structures of capitalism that alienate them. They accept the conditions forced upon them and no longer seek to rebel against a world that substantially impoverishes their labour, their spirit and their creativity.

There is little doubt that Marx was correct to point out, using the concept of alienation, the inhuman labouring conditions with which the nineteenth century proletariat was, and many millions of workers still are, faced around the world. Should the worker-consumer be seen merely as a confused being who unconsciously reproduces, to use Bourdieu’s language, the conditions of their domination? My intention here is not to put Marx in the dock, so to speak, since he is an author whose materialism has remained uniquely insightful for over a century. However, I would like to try and show that, by dint of favouring almost exclusively the concept of alienation in Marx’s work, there is a considerable risk that materialism will adopt only a negative path.

It is that essential insight of Marx’s thinking which I would like to put into perspective by suggesting a new agenda for materialist thought which I would characterize, for now, as positive. This research agenda has already found its place in recent debates on 20th century critical and materialist theory (XXX, 2015a, XXX, 2015b). A theoretical base should now be established drawing upon debates about the birth of materialism itself in the 19th century. The following pages attempt to do so by drawing upon the main theoretician of libertarian anarchism, Marx’s rival in socialist theory, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

Little known in the Anglo-Saxon world, Proudhon was the first thinker of French socialism,
anarchist and libertarian rather than communist. His work, as extensive as that of Marx, was a great success among the European intelligentsia of the working class until his death (in Paris in 1865, aged 56). But after the publication of Marx’s *Das Kapital* (1867) and the third congress of the IWA (International Workingmen’s Association) in September 1868 in Brussels, it was the influence of Marx’s State collectivism theory that became predominant (Bernstein, 1952). Today, as communism has been defeated by capitalism, more and more French authors are reviving Proudhon to develop utopian reflections based on alternative economic models, such as the very fashionable idea of the “commons” (Dardot, Laval, 2015). In the Anglo-Saxon world, some significant intellectuals deal happily with the tradition of anarchist political theory prefigured by Proudhon (Graeber, 2013, Chomsky, 2013). But very few study what was at the heart of his thought: his sociology of labour within cooperatives. Yet without this sociology, which places faith in the self-emancipatory capacities of social actors such as workers, no philosophy of the “commons” is possible. And the notion of “autonomy”, so dear to contemporary anarchist theorists, loses its meaning.

To adequately assess the originality of this Proudhonian sociology, I will first study the meaning that Marx gave to the alienation / emancipation dialectic in his early works. As Ricoeur (1988) shows, Marx later developed a "Scientific System" in which he tended to marginalize these concepts as if he had already said all there was to say about them. In doing so he left emancipation defined only negatively as the destruction of alienation produced by capitalist firms. By developing the two paradoxes of his definition of work and alienated labour (with reference to Arendt’s work in particular), I will show that Marx remains rooted in Hegelian idealism (sections 1, 2 and 3). His definition of work, influenced by Hegel and focused negatively upon alienation, prevents us from considering popular alternatives to capitalism as emancipatory because, according to this definition, emancipation can only be achieved in a post-revolutionary society.

By contrast, the libertarian materialism of Proudhon seeks emancipation in the everyday life
praxis of cooperative workers. My suggestion is that Proudhon’s approach offers some new and powerful theoretical foundations for the theory of social economy. Until now, this theory has mainly focused on the economic study of cooperatives (Neamtan, 2005, Defourny et al, 2009). Despite neglecting any real history of ideas, it has brought 19\textsuperscript{th}-century utopias to the fore (Defourny, 1992, Develtere, 1994, Moulaert, Alienei, 2005), arguing that economic theory has to reconsider this tradition as a serious alternative to both neoliberalism and a moribund socialism which eventually turned social-liberal in Europe. We must acknowledge how important these heterodox works are within the ocean of orthodox economics. And as we will see, the characteristics according to which they define a cooperative are useful. But because their underlying aim is to overcome the contemporary opposition between neoliberalism and a state-governed economy by promoting a “third way” or a “third sector”, they do not recognise how close the utopian 19\textsuperscript{th}-century thinkers they quote as founders of their own economic theory were to Marx.

If, via the sociology of Proudhon, we study 19th-century utopian thought in its context, we can see that it is no less idealistic than the Marxist solution to alienation against which it is set by contemporary authors. This utopian thought even goes beyond Marx in developing a conception of science or knowledge that leads revolution towards a world in which work is solely spiritual or organized around a blueprint conceived in the mind of the socialist intellectual (sections 4 and 5).

This discussion of utopianism, on the one hand, and of Marx's Hegelian idealism on the other, will raise the possibility of emancipation through labour which is not exclusively dependent on revolution. These reflections are at the heart of Proudhon’s work. His thought is notable for the way in which it manages to see in a worker something other than a slaving animal deprived of subjectivity by capitalism, existing merely as a tool of production under heteronomous labour conditions. I will try to show that Proudhon was right to believe that labour can be autonomous and led by principles of reciprocity in opposition to those of modern capitalism. The role of theory, in
Proudhon’s view, should be to express and organize these principles, rather than condemn them as contaminated by the heteronomous norms of capitalism (sections 6 and 7).

Showing why I disagree with the heirs of utopianism and with the heirs of some contemporary marxist theorists – who see emancipation everywhere except in labour relations – I will conclude by reflecting on cooperative endeavours which incorporate attempts at autonomy here and now, within cooperatives that already exist, even if they are impure (section 8). Given that these actions are part of our present reality, materialism, if anything, may be considered to be positive even if radically non-utopian, non-spiritualist and non-Hegelian, whilst remaining uncertain about how a world of cooperatives would work.

1. Marx, left wing Hegelian

As materialist as he was, the young Marx was more indebted to the intellectualist legacy of Hegel than he wished to admit (Méda, 1995). According to Hegel, modernity as we know it (and thus the end of History) is characterised by the triumph of the spirit over matter. By being opposed to physical objects, or, as Hegel would have it, by 'denying' them (they are not 'me'), the spirit transforms and assimilates them, turning them into a part of itself – into its own knowledge. Through his labour of assimilation, a man knows and masters nature with increasing success. According to the Hegelian approach, labour becomes the mediator between spirit and nature, enabling the first to dominate the second.

Thus the chemist will, for example, turn a block of stone into diverse molecules. By doing so, he assimilates that stone into precise knowledge which will be part of him. Meanwhile, the archaeologist will turn the same stone into something else (a trace of an ancient civilization) in order to assimilate it into another form of knowledge which will be part of him. The end of History,
or absolute knowledge, is nothing but this moment when the spirit has taken everything that was outside of itself under all forms of knowledge (as per our examples). Yet this amounts to the spirit knowing itself since all those objects of knowledge are now its abstractions, its components. Therefore, the history of man has a meaning, a purpose – in short, a teleology: the perfect coincidence of the spirit with itself. All that was external and unknown to it, even frightening (for example, lightning once attributed to the wrath of God) has become itself. Eventually, the known object is only a pretext for the spirit to discover itself by being enriched with new knowledge, which, along with the infinity of other knowledge, constitutes knowledge in its absolute form.

As expressed by Hegel, the spirit, like a child, never ceases to go beyond its representations, which have lasted until the present moment, towards new ones that seem more propitious. 'Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward', as if it were in permanent gestation (Hegel, 1977: 6). Human evolution tends toward the labour of the universal. Labour in its absolute fulfillment will take other forms than those it knew in the eighteenth century, which were still mainly manual and laborious. The life of the spirit will then develop in abstraction. And this development will become the only activity likely to be considered as labour: scientific, political, artistic, philosophical, etc. The labour of material production will, for its part, be delegated to industry.

Marx incorporates the Hegelian idea of historical development. But he endeavours to demonstrate that if Hegel has: 'found the abstract, logical, speculative expression for the movement of history; [...] this historical process is not yet the real history of man - of man as a given subject' (Marx, Engels, 2011: 104). As noted by Salem in his French introduction to the Manuscripts of 1844, Marx acknowledges that Hegel: 'has grasped the essence of human labour and showed that it transforms nature by shaping it to impose the human mark on it. With Hegel, Man masters nature, the subject penetrates its object' (Salem, 1996: 39, Author’s translation). This Hegelian man,
however, far from referring to a suffering and hard-working material individual, remains the incarnation of spirit at a specific time in history labouring to make it evolve towards its own end. According to Marx, materialism will attempt to put an end to this illegitimate privilege that spirit still assumes over the body in Hegel’s thought, affirming that, through abstraction, such spirit is only assimilated to a completely transcendent divine identity, whereas men of flesh and bone are those who create history through their concrete activity. For Marx, this activity is no longer that of a conscience which knows itself, but exclusively that of individuals who, through their material constructions, humanise hostile and wild nature.

In sum, we can argue that the main difference between these two philosophers can be found in the way they consider nature’s domestication. For Hegel, this domestication is cognitive, since the informed spirit penetrates nature by denying it. According to Marx, it is achieved through each man’s action, that is, his labour. As Marx wrote in his third manuscript: 'the only labor which Hegel knows and recognizes is abstractly mental labor' (Marx, Engels, 2011: 108). By contrast, Marx wishes to consider all human production as labour. In each instance of production, the creative individual expresses himself and is acknowledged by others – rather like Picasso who demonstrates through *Guernica* all his cubist and anti-franquist singularity.

Marx points out the triple quality of labour: It transforms the natural world into a human world, it reveals me to myself, and finally, it reveals my sociability since the object that emerges from my labour reveals me to others (as in *Guernica* by Picasso). Thus construed, the exchange between men is no longer a mercantile exchange but a pure relation of expression since each object becomes the image of its creator. Arendt concurs. With Marx, we see for the first time the idea of a completely 'socialized mankind' in which 'the distinction between labor and work would have completely disappeared, all work would have become labor; because all things would be understood, not in their worldly, objective quality, but as results of living labor power' (Arendt, 1998: 89). Ultimately, for Marx, labour becomes 'the source of all productivity and the expression

2. Marx's first paradox of labour

If, in the Manuscripts of 1844, labour is positively identified with the expression and the fulfillment of the self, how can the same Marx adopt a critical perspective that challenges labour and advocates its drastic reduction a few years later in Das Kapital (see Marx, 1977, chapter X: 340-416)? As Arendt writes: 'such fundamental and flagrant contradictions rarely occur in second-rate writers; in the work of the great authors they lead into the very center of their work' (Arendt, 1998: 105). With Marx, the fundamental question consists in asking to what extent the formerly valued labour and that whose reduction is advocated are not, in fact, of the same nature. The answer can be guessed and is developed in Marx's theorisation of communism. The labour that must be reduced is obviously alienated industrial labour, even though it often produces things that are essential to human life (whether agricultural or factory production). Moving towards the eradication of this type of labour ensures that 'the area of freedom supplants that of necessity'. Indeed, Marx adds, 'the realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper' (Marx, 1981: 958-959). Once immediate physical needs have been satisfied, 'the development of human powers as an end in itself begins' (Marx, 1981: 959)\(^1\).

In order for men to communicate fully and freely through labour, all their biological needs must already have been satisfied so that, freed from their relation with nature, they can produce for

\(^1\) Besides, everyone knows this famous excerpt: 'Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, while man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need while man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom' (Marx, Engels, 2011: 54).
purposes other than the satisfaction of these biological needs. A man freed from need and from all material and natural necessity becomes nothing more than an individual who resolves himself to his social being and to interactivity with his fellows. Everyone’s purpose is therefore to take part in the evolution of human history through his productions.

But in the mid-nineteenth century Marx recognised that, far from being a factor of emancipation, labour unfortunately seems to be completely alienated in the sense that its purpose is not personal development but self-enrichment. Whilst everyone is supposed to benefit from their labour and take pleasure in it by expressing themself through it – and even though everyone is supposed to materialise their gifts in it beyond all already satisfied natural necessity – labour in a capitalist society regresses and becomes the only way to support the most basic needs. 'By degrading man’s free creative activity to the rank of means of livelihood, alienated labour turns his generic life into an instrument for his physical existence' (Meda, 1995: 105, Author’s translation). In other words, we no longer have a form of labour which allows self-manifestation but a mere means of survival. The purpose of labour is no longer the enjoyment that a man can know after having satisfied his needs, but the means of satisfaction itself. He becomes mere merchandise.

The worker confronts his own product as if it were an unknown product which does not correspond to him at all2. He trades it for a salary and he produces it for someone else who will pay for it3. The contradiction is to be found at the very heart of this double pole and the relation between man and object that it implies. Not only does the worker become alienated from production, to which he becomes a slave in order to subsist; moreover, he himself as a worker becomes an object that the owner buys and will perform his labour only by necessity, alienated from the rest of his life.

2 'The object which labor produces – labor’s product – confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor’s realization is its objectification. In the condition dealt with by political economy this realization of labor appears as a loss of reality for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and object-bondage; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation' (Marx, Engels, 2011: 50).

3 In this way, the alienation, the estrangement, is manifest: 'in the fact that my means of life belong to someone else, that my desire is the inaccessible possession of another' (Marx, Engels, 2011: 89).
Alienated labour is nothing but that which Smith took all labour to be: labour defined as a burden, a sacrifice that we inflict upon ourselves in order to obtain goods and endlessly increase production. This is why Althusser observes that political economy is not at all the science of labour but the phenomenology of alienated labour, that is to say a science that will consider labour only through pain and production (Althusser, 2005: 157-160). And for Marx, material production must not exceed abundance. Once the latter is reached, material production proper must be stopped in order to enable everyone to create their own essence through labour.

Emancipation, then, implies the increase of free time and leisure thanks to which the worker finds their dignity and the possibility of developing free and genuine labour, that is to say, labour which results in a piece of work. Here we find the connection Marx makes between free labour and artistic work as opposed to alienated labour, an opposition clearly conceptualised by Arendt in terms of *homo faber* and *animal laborans*. Currently reduced to a state of *animal laborans*, man must endeavour to return to his state of *homo faber*, his status of creator and artist. According to Arendt, in this lies 'the hope that inspired Marx and the best men of various workers’ movements – that free time eventually will emancipate men from necessity and make the *animal laborans* productive'. Nevertheless, for Arendt, this hope 'rests on the illusion of a mechanistic philosophy which assumes that labor power, like any other energy, can never be lost, so that if it is not spent and exhausted in the drudgery of life it will automatically nourish other, “higher”, activities' (Arendt 1998: 133). Increasing free time against the slavery of labour is necessary until the implosion of capitalism and the advent of communism because, in the latter system, man knows that labouring is not producing, it is (artistic) working.

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4 *Homo faber* who makes literally “works upon” as distinguished from the *animal laborans* which labors and “mixes with” (Arendt, 1998: 136).
3. Marx’s second paradox and negative materialism

Whereas we can clearly see how the expression-alienation paradox is only a subtle dialectic used by Marx in order to offer an original criticism of capitalism, another contradiction seems harder to resolve. In fact, despite this significant materialist watershed and the profound desire to reintroduce an immanent perspective, we may agree with Méda and Althusser that Marx remains closer to Hegel than he wishes to admit. Both share a fear of the naturally given, a refusal of man’s animality, and an endorsement of technical evolution to domesticate untamed nature.

Indeed, although Marx firmly seeks to go beyond the Hegelian abstraction of the spirit and towards the concrete man, we must ask ourselves if, in that type of ideal communist society which ensures the conciliation between individual expression and collectivity, and does so exclusively through labour, sociability itself does not turn into something extremely abstract which occurs through signs. While abundance is acquired through the machine and the communist management of wealth, the ultimate purpose of production is to enable individuals to exchange mirrors of what they are. It is no longer about making objects whose purpose is to satisfy needs, but building abstractions in which society feels its own sociability. It is as if labour were only a pretext, a stage where individuals can collectively perform, each inclining towards what they essentially are and towards what they are socially, a place where the product is nothing but a support for something else.

It is the distinction Marx makes between his two types of labour which exposes his latent Hegelianism. On the one hand, labour aims at the satisfaction of our physical needs and must be minimised. It is what characterises capitalist societies in which each man is defined by his elementary and biological needs which he is not given the opportunity to transcend. On the other hand, labour is promoted to the rank of means of self-emancipation which evolves within the ideal
sphere of freedom detached from any material need, enabling the eradication of labour falling under the first definition. Eventually, like Hegel, Marx values a 'leisure' labour, an abstract labour, a labour of the spirit that is in fact an art work, in opposition to material labour which, as minimised as possible, enables the satisfaction of our natural needs. Marx’s free labour has only enjoyable and non-binding objects. The rest must be taken care of by the machine. This developmental and expressive labour, which is both individual and social, is almost exclusively idealist and intellectualist since its purpose is the pure expression of the self to itself and to others from a simple and inconsequential material support. Marx’s disalienated labour therefore seems to be about spirits that present themselves to others by communicating what they are through a game of mirrors between art works. Nevertheless, such labour can only occur when socialism, through revolution – that is to say the taking up of power, of the reins of the State by the proletarian party – generates the ideal communist society. Until then, nothing can be valued in the worker’s activity. It is in that sense, close to that in which Chouraqui talks about Marx’s negative universalism (2015: 476), that we can talk about negative materialism.

With Marx, it is as if theoretical activity solely and wholly consisted in the comprehensive rejection of this world. No matter the context in which he labours (factory, workshop, agriculture, etc.), capitalism renders man back to his animality and to a pure pathos of suffering. He is condemned to material production without ever having the possibility of expressing himself abstractly as a socialised being.

In his youthful writings, Marx had already carried out this cold but probably accurate analysis of the Irish or English factory worker:

'Light, air, etc.- the simplest animal cleanliness – ceases to be a need for man. Dirt - this stagnation and putrefaction of man-the sewage of civilization (speaking quite literally)-comes to be the element of life for him. Utter, unnatural neglect, putrefied nature, comes to be his life-element. None of his senses exist any longer, and not only in his human fashion, but in an inhuman fashion, and therefore not even in animal fashion […]. The savage and the animal have at least the need to
hunt, to roam, etc. – the need of companionship. Machine labor is simplified in order to make a worker out of the human being still in the making, the completely immature human being, the child - while the worker has become a neglected child. The machine accommodates itself to the weakness of the human being in order to make the weak human being into a machine' (Marx, Engels, 2011: 83).

Theoretical activity must do nothing other than lift the veil on this state of affairs.

What Marx seems to share with the conservative spirit of his time is the idea that the proletariat is unvarying, that all the alienated workers present vile and degraded human characteristics. As he will write in his inaugural address to the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), it may be true that 'workers' emancipation must be the work of the workers themselves' (Marx, [1867], 1964). But given what he says about the alienated worker and, by extension, the entire working class, we can hardly believe that the latter will ever rise up. This is what Marx's most lucid successors will clearly detect, notably those in the group Socialism or Barbarism. For example, Lefort writes that Marx depicts the proletariat in such gloomy terms that we are entitled to wonder how the worker can aspire to consciousness of his conditions and his role as a leader of humanity. Capitalism has turned him into a machine and deprived him of 'any human nature, physically and morally' (Lefort, 1979a: 73, Author’s translation). From his youthful to his mature writings, Marx refuses to consider that the worker may, before the revolution, escape the destitute condition of his class, and become at least a little emancipated. Whilst he affirmed in his youthful works that the worker tends to praxis (synonymous with artistic work at the time) through revolution, he will give this up later, concluding praxis to be too full of the defects of capitalism to be 'recyclable', and he will turn to another form of 'art', that is, science.

This transition from Marx's youthful writings to his mature work is anything but insignificant. If there is no doubt that the scientific political economy developed in Marx's mature works will be tremendously useful to the political struggle against capitalism – whose mechanisms it analyses in detail – these works still obliterate what, in Marx's youthful writings, was about
recognition, to paraphrase Honneth, that is, recognition of a popular skill through emancipatory praxis and the critical return of the worker to his own life conditions within this society. And because in later works he never returns to his analysis of the potentially emancipatory dimension of praxis, condemned to be alienated by workers’ life conditions, Marx leaves us with the feeling that the only solution possible is a negative revolution which will abolish this society and retrieve free and artistic work in some future society.

4. Proudhon and the materiality of workers’ praxis against utopia

In his later work, then, it appears as if Marx had lost his belief in the critical potential of the working class and its own praxis. It was hard to prove him wrong. The workers who took part in the *Manifeste des soixante* deplored the havoc illiteracy and alcohol created in their ranks. Their text, however, brought something else to light, that is, the worker’s consciousness of persisting as a being who does not reduce himself to what capitalism has made of him. And this was sensed better by Proudhon than by Marx.

In spite of this, since he was not a communist Proudhon cannot be categorised in the second important tradition of nineteenth century socialism, that of utopians. Indeed he simply did not suggest any utopia, even ‘concrete’ as was often believed – including by Marx himself (Wright, 2010: 234-235). The problem with utopian theories is in the end identical to that of Marxism. Their view complicates any theory of emancipation since they can only be based concretely upon a

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5 Surprisingly, while Proudhon’s oeuvre is almost as big as that of Marx and edited in French, there remain few books translated into English (see 1888 and 1890)
6 This *Manifeste des soixante ouvriers de la Seine*, through which they invited their peers to run for elections, was published in *L’opinion Nationale* on 17 February, 1864 and in *Le Temps* on 18 February. It can also be read in Proudhon’s annex sections (1977, t.2: 420-429).
fantasised and ideal future society which does not yet exist, equivalent to the communist society in which, for Marxists, labour is disalienated. If Marx was indeed idealist in the sense that he projected emancipation onto a future society, he never described that future society concretely. It was not necessary to do so because whatever its institutional organisation, such a society would be ideal as long as it was a classless society – and social classes, in Marx’s view, would have been destroyed by revolution. Utopian thinkers went further and fancied forms of community organisation totally dreamt up in their imaginations, even if they wanted to trial these forms first at the micro-level before imposing them through the power of the State. This was especially true of Cabet, Fourier and Saint-Simon who provided some very detailed plans of the ideal cooperatives and the ideal community they intended to create. This constant reference to the utopian imagination continues to be problematic to this day, because it still inspires contemporary authors who situate themselves within the anarchist or socialist libertarian tradition, such as Graeber (2004 : 20-21), or in the tradition of social economy (Defourny, 1992, Develtere, 1995). But as the very first libertarian and anarchist socialist, Proudhon showed that utopianism asks workers not to believe in what they already are and what they already create, even partially. On the contrary, utopia invites them to believe in something better, higher, and always to be built.

In its attempt to renew materialism, this critique of utopia is similar to that of Holloway (2010: 209 and 236). But Holloway refers to material praxis, “rooted in doing”, without ever quoting Proudhon’s reflections on praxis (2002: 23 and 155sq.). By contrast, other scholars – such as Erik Olin Wright – acknowledge Proudhon and the anarchist tradition’s focus on workers’ and consumers’ cooperatives that at the time were building alternative institutions and deliberately fostering new forms of social relation that embodied emancipation in the present (Wright, 2010: 324-329). But Wright assigns these cooperatives to utopian ideals. Yet 150 years ago Proudhon combined a materialist stance (focusing upon praxis) and a critique of utopianism without agreeing with that other materialist enemy of utopian authors, Marx. In particular he attacks the
revolutionary conceptions that Cabet sets out in *Voyage en Icarie* (1848, Paris, *Bureau du populaire*), in which Cabet shows how to organise and construct what he sees as an ideal community of labour⁸. According to Proudhon:

'Mr. Cabet does not conceive of social revolution as a possible effect of the development of institutions and of the cooperation of intellects […]. Mr. Cabet will bring about reform through advice, through will, through the great mission of a hero, messiah and representative of the Icarians. Mr. Cabet certainly holds back from allowing new law to emerge from the discussions of an assembly regularly produced by popular election: it is too slow a means and would compromise everything. He needs a MAN. After having suppressed all individual wills, he gathers them in a supreme individuality which expresses collective thought as Aristotle’s motionless engine brings growth to all subaltern activities' (Proudhon, 1957: 68, Author's translation)

My hypothesis is that, having shared his reflections, notably concerning praxis, Proudhon would stray from Marx for the same reasons for which he refused to be classified among the utopians. Unlike Marx, Proudhon left the library and attempted to become deeply impregnated with workers’ experiences through sociological inquiry. Following the revolutions of 1848, Proudhon began to study closely the way cooperative labour was self-organised. He was particularly fascinated by the cooperative workshops run by the Canuts in which he carried out surveys and observations. These weavers were capable of maintaining the political position of the rebellion – everyone remembers their insurrections of 1831, 1834 and 1848 at the dawn of the Second Republic – and of developing a form of autonomous organisation of labour. Like Marx, Proudhon develops a theory of labour praxis as the true expression of man. But unlike Marx, he does not then reject it in a totally disalienated post-revolutionary future. The abstract activity of the spirit that displays itself in pieces of artwork must not be seen as a form of labour which would, in a communist society, transcend industrial and 'hard-working' labour; on the contrary, it is immediately present in the worker’s present life.

⁸ Cabet is the only utopian socialist who tried to realize a utopian community of workers in Illinois, 'The Icaria'. But the project collapsed after lasting for 5 years – from 1850 to 1855 – because his authoritarianism was judged to be a threat to freedom. Some members tried to found other Icarian communities in Illinois or Iowa with more or less success (the last one collapsed in 1895). (See C. H. Johnson, 1974 and L. J. Roberts, 1991.)
5. Praxis of disalienation VS disalienated science

According to Proudhon, therefore, the intellectual’s task does not involve developing a negative materialist theory which helps individuals become aware of their labouring condition in order to escape from it and think, but consists in immersing themselves in this condition (XXX, 2009, XXX and XXX, 2011). Intellectuals must 'observe how the population connects to certain ideas rather than to others, how it generalizes them, how it develops them in its own way, how it turns them into institutions and customs that it traditionally follows, until they end up in the hands of legislators and upholders of the law who, when their time comes, turn them into articles of law and rules for courts'. As regards labour, he specifically foresees that 'it will be the same for the idea of reciprocity' within associations or cooperatives. (Proudhon, 1977: 70-71, Author's translation). As old as the social State, 'the organic power and the revolutionary impact of this idea [of reciprocity] has been foreseen by several speculative minds but it is only since 1848 that it has gained in importance' (Proudhon, 1977: 80-81, Author's translation). Far from the emerging factories with which Marx was fascinated, Proudhon was enthralled by the first forms of credit, health insurance and cooperatives which took shape in workshops and small enterprises. He attempted to extract the original substrate out of these developments, that is, reciprocity (Gardin, 2006).

The practice of reciprocity embodies par excellence what I would like to theorise as positive materialist theory. It is conditioned by an anthropological principle of common humanity (Boltanski, Thévenot, 2006; XXX, 2009, chap.2): 'Man, as a reason-endowed being, has the ability to feel dignity for other people, as for himself – to assert himself as an individual as well as a species. Justice is the product of this ability: it is the spontaneously felt and reciprocally ensured respect of human dignity' (Proudhon, 1988: 423, Author's translation). This theory would make Proudhon one of the leaders of libertarian socialism, a project which he envisaged to be fully
coherent with the anarchist nature of his words. Men must be economically and politically organised by referring to this principle of reciprocity, rather than to any authority. The materialist task invariably comes with two dimensions, one positive and the other negative. One must highlight the alienation specific to the capitalist mode of production. And the other must emphasise practices of emancipation already initiated in cooperative workshop experiments in reciprocity.

The theory of reciprocity does not rest upon science in the manner of Marx’s theory of alienation. In the mature works such as Das Kapital this science, rather than praxis, becomes the basis of a critique of ideology. Like Mounier (1966: 91 and s.), Paul Ricoeur considers this 'scientific' Marx to be much less striking than the young Marx. The ‘scientific’ Marx loses interest in the 'real life' of 'real individuals', producing work whose structuralist interpretation would lead Althusser astray in the promotion of science over the praxis which he, even more than Marx, believes to be contaminated by the ideology of capitalism (Ricoeur, 1988: 134-135). Conversely, Proudhon sticks to praxis and generates the principle of reciprocity from proletarian life itself.

In this respect, one must not ignore Proudhon’s and young Marx’s similarity, given the importance both ascribe to praxis. However, no matter when he is writing, with or without Engels, aged 25 or 50, Marx takes a more negative critical path, taking aim at a deprived man returning to his animal condition. In spite of the exhortation in Marx's early writings to foreground workers’ experiences, workers are always characterised by their shortcomings and their vulgarity. As productive forces within industrial factories, workers must be understood because they make history; but they are understood to do so as a class alienated by industrial capitalism. The purpose of materialist theory is to assist that class to evolve towards consciousness of its own condition, in the youthful writings, or towards science (which will supplant the role of consciousness) and the scientific criticism of ideology, in the mature works. Nevertheless, in his youthful writings Marx’s attempt to support the emancipation of a partially confused working class is still firmly connected to praxis, and therefore to workers’ associative and cooperative activities. But his criticism will lose
this positive link as soon as it restricts itself to the critique of ideology (XXXX, 2009).

As Chomsky notes, under the conditions of industrial capitalism “man will not be free to develop his own potentialities to their fullest, and the producer will remain ‘a fragment of a human being’, degraded, a tool in the productive process directed from above” (2013:16). He argues that Marx was a “classical libertarian socialist” in this regard, like Bakunin. In the next section I will try to show that the same could not be said about Proudhon. Chomsky perhaps over-extends the term “classical libertarian”\(^9\). Because he pays attention only to the Proudhonian theoretical aim of overcoming both private and bureaucratic control of the means of production, he does not see the importance of Proudhon's sociology and empirical work, which suggest a positive representation of work here and now. Chomsky consequently emphasises the “last emancipatory phase of history” and the “final act of liberation that places control over the economy in the hands of free and voluntary associations of producers” – occurrences in which anarchists would have placed their hopes – drawing close to Marx and even to some utopian thinkers such as Fourier (Chomsky, 2013: 11-12). And he downplays what he previously and correctly underlined, and what we develop in the following sections: that some anarchists sought first to support ‘free associations of free producers’, “sought, even under capitalism, (…) to prepare, to take over the organization of production on a democratic basis”. This was particularly true for Proudhon, who could be considered as reformist rather than revolutionary, from a common political point of view.

6. The role of theory

I have shown in previous sections that utopianism rests on intellectual plans for the

\(^9\) Of course, Chomsky is totally right to say that contemporary American libertarians such as Nozick or Rothbarb suggest unbridled capitalism more than a real libertarianism. The term is overused by them. “The american version of libertarianism is an aberration” (2013:30-31).
organization of work in the future and for an ideal society. In the same way, the “old Marx”, even if he provided no plans, wanted a science that would lead revolution towards a world in which work would be purely spiritual, a pure expression of workers’ subjectivity and sociality. Young Marx would have said that pure artistic expression is contained in workers’ praxis within contemporary capitalist society, but that it will be restricted until revolution releases its potential.

For Proudhon, materialist theory must first address the worker's practice and find in it the principles of action that are able to generate structures of disalienation. In his text entitled *Philosophie populaire*¹⁰, which opens his imposing *De la justice dans la révolution et dans l’Eglise*¹¹, Proudhon describes his project in these terms:

> 'The people pray for their princes, for their magistrates, for their exploiters and parasites, they pray for their executioners, they pray for the very ones who should by rights pray for them. They pay the government, the courts, the police, the church, the nobility, the crown, the proprietor, the soldier. They pay for every move they make, pay to come and to go, to buy and to sell, to eat, drink and breathe, to warm themselves in the sun, to be born and to die, They even pay for the permission to labour. The people have never done anything but pray and pay: we believe that the time has come to make them PHILOSOPHIZE' (Proudhon, 1988: 7, Author's translation).

Paradoxically, at first we might believe that such a project is nothing less than Marxist. The deprived people must escape their miserable condition and aspire to philosophical science if they cherish the opportunity to break that condition. Proudhon, however, seeks to prove something other than Marx's perspective.

As with Marx, the paradox reveals Proudhon's interest. Materialism is not on the side of disalienated labour, which explains why making people think, according to Proudhon, is not, as in a Hegelian approach, to make them deny the object of their labour in order to affirm the centrality of a spirit which knows itself. And this is for the simple reason that labour as it exists in certain places already includes emancipation. More precisely, the principles enunciated by philosophers must be nothing other than principles that people implement in their own life and labour, which arise

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¹⁰ Popular Philosophy
¹¹ On Justice in the Revolution and in the Church
disalienated in their praxis. Proudhon, following his long observations of canut workshops, writes that there is no:

'artisan who is not in a perfect state to understand what philosophy proposes, since there is not one who, in the exercise of his profession, does not make use of several means of justification, measure, evaluation and control. The worker has, to direct him in his labours, the yardstick, the scale, the square, the rule, the plumb, the level, the compass, standards, specimens, guides, a touchstone, etc. Seemingly, there is not a worker who cannot say the purpose of his labour, the ensemble of needs or ideas to which it is attached, what its application must be, what its conditions and qualities are, and consequently its importance in the general economy. Now, what the artisan does for his specialty, the philosopher seeks for the universality of things: his criterion, consequently, must be much more elementary, since it must be applied to all; his synthesis much broader, since it must embrace all. What then is the yardstick to which we must relate all our observations? In the second place, on what basis, according to what plan, in view of what end, will we raise the edifice of our knowledge, so that we can say what Leibniz said of the world of which it must be the expression, that it is the best, the most faithful, the most perfect possible? The day when philosophy has responded to these two questions, we will not say that it is done (it has no limits) but it will be completely organized' (Proudhon, 1988: 33-34, Author's translation).

And it is, so to speak, organised, since the yardstick, this standard of everything that the philosopher gains from the worker, like the plan from which he will be able to trace transversely the link between the worker’s practices, is the tool which shapes reciprocity. It passes through the hands of the experienced worker and their apprentices, and in their daily practices lies the recognition of a common humanity as workers. In Proudhon’s empirical works, in which he describes his sociological survey within workers’ cooperatives, it is as if philosophy had to withdraw as soon as it has fulfilled its task (in the end a minor one), pointing out the concepts contained in the proletarian practice that cooperative workers already express in the way they characterise their labour, handle their tools and pass on the knowledge of their use. And all of these concepts have a critical task before them because they, as a whole, are opposed to alienated labour under bourgeois capitalism. Thus the idea of class has an essentially spontaneous aspect since it

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12 *De la capacité de la classe ouvrière* states that: 'The working classes have revealed their secret. We know that after they started to believe, for a moment, in 1848, in the ideas of common life, common labour, family State or servant State (that is to say, respectively, in Fourierian and Cabetian mistakes which consist either in believing that we can construct artificial and ideal communities or in believing in the fiction of a socialist-tutor State), they abandoned that utopia; and that on the other hand, they do not express themselves with less strength against the [bourgeois’ anarchist economic] system and that their thought is focused on a unique, but also practicable, principle: the principle of
only emerges as a result of autonomous practice. This spontaneity does not imply that the idea is formulated mechanically with the extension of autonomous practice. Proudhon points out that the understanding of the present, and the projection that the idea implies, suggest a creation through which the class develops its own critical materials and expresses its own reality in words. The class must express through speaking, explain through reasoning, that is to say, express and rationalise its own reality through a critical work of release which becomes a form of creation of a non-capitalist theory (Ansart, 1969: 227). The thinker, at best, emerges when it becomes necessary to indicate that a juxtaposition of practices and their verbalization by workers is possible and that this synthesis is revolutionary, achieved in acts that are completely different from existing economic practices. He summarizes what has always been there.

7. The principles of reciprocity

For Proudhon, the labour of a worker in a cooperative workshop based on reciprocity is an artistic gesture, that is, the use of the yardstick or the scale is that of a partner who shares with his fellow worker his instruments of production and those productions themselves. This gesture is not the gesture of a pure Hegelian spirit. It is disalienating in itself even while it is material, laborious or even troublesome from time to time. It is so 'here and now', not in a post-revolutionary hereafter which should finally see the proletarian realise his true identity as homo faber. In Proudhon’s anthropology, man is, in his current labour (that is, in a hostile capitalist environment which his workshop must oppose), a producer of matter (object) and concept (reciprocity). Proudhon asks: 'laboring is praying, says an old proverb. Could we not also say: whoever labours, as long as he pays attention to his own labour, philosophizes?' (Proudhon, 1977: 14, Author's translation).
Disalienated labour or praxis displays pieces of work, Marx would write. It delivers the plans which enable one to think, adds Proudhon. This illustrates how, from the constraint of practical nature, a theoretical maxim emerges. The idea was generated by the action[s]' of a few. Action is a form of thinking: 'acting is always thinking'. And thinking, when one is suffering from strenuous labour and exploitation, spontaneously criticises what generates the conditions of exploitation to enforce its counterpart, that is, reciprocity. This general concept of reciprocity is embedded in the praxis of cooperative workers. And because it is apprehensible from this material labour itself, we can talk about a materialism which is radically different from a utopianism or an idealism. For that matter, it is still the expression of the synthesis of other concepts materially embodied in the labour of activist cooperatives today, rather than in the utopia of some leaders quoted by scholars (Moulaert, Alienei, 2005, Defourny et al. 2009). The cooperative embodies the following features (Neatman, 2005: 71-72):

- their purpose is to serve members and the community, rather than profit (reciprocity of service);
- self-management (reciprocity of power);
- democratic decision-making: 1 person = 1 vote (reciprocity in decision-making);
- collective ownership of capital and means of production (reciprocity of property);
- primacy of people and work over capital in the distribution of income (reciprocity of profit).

It should be borne in mind that, from a socialist libertarian point of view, these concepts still need to be philosophically developed and politically promoted against private property, labour marketisation, capitalist shareholding, etc.

It is well known that Marx and Proudhon parted ways with completely opposing perspectives, although they had mutual admiration for each other. Proudhon’s theory of reciprocity, formalised after his sociological surveys and his meetings with cooperatives, leads him to see in man’s material labour the birthplace of socialism, disalienation, emancipation, democracy and philosophical reflection. Unlike Hegel, the spirit does not deny matter. It emerges from it and
remains intrinsically blended into it. Provided that this labour is freely orientated and decreed in a cooperative workshop, as opposed to a factory where the workers must submit to their bosses, it may not be alienated but may become a vector of subjective realisation. The equation which makes critical theory the \textit{a priori} product of manual labour and the drive to self-organisation motivates Proudhon to turn the cooperative (or the “association” or the “workshop”, depending on the texts) into the cradle of autonomy, in place of a scientific critical theory \textit{a posteriori}. However, this was inconceivable for Marx, according to whom Proudhon was a nostalgist who, in an era of industrialization, sought to: 'bring us back to the companion, at most to the master, workman of the Middle Ages' (Marx, 2014:157). Revolution must be more demanding because it cannot accept that the humanity of workers is expressed occasionally within some 'retrograde cooperative', rather than in a (utopian) post-revolutionary industrial society.

The tone became tougher with time, and soon \textit{Das Kapital} would utterly reject the cooperative rather than simply criticising its weakness and the erratic aspect of its disalienated realisations, which are unable to: 'stop the geometrical progress of monopoly, to emancipate the masses and to lighten the burden of their misery.' Of course, the German thinker still accepted that the cooperative or the association may constitute a model for the future of socialism. But as long as the conquest of political power, guided by the critical scientific theory embodied by the party, does not take place, the cooperative remains, so to speak, ballasted by capitalist labour methods. This capitalist form of cooperation 'presupposes from the outset the free wage-labourer who sells his labour-power to capital […]. Capitalist cooperation does not appear as a particular historical form of cooperation, instead, cooperation itself appears as a historical form peculiar to, and specifically distinguishing, the capitalist process of production' (Marx, 1977: 452-453). Published in 1867, \textit{Das Kapital} and its criticism of cooperation fell like a bombshell onto the IWA, Even if the First International (1864) had broadly consisted of workers' associations marked by Proudhon's influence, these associations progressively disappeared from the scene. On the occasion of the

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Second International in 1889, Marx’s triumph was total and the workers’ cooperatives were no longer represented (Desroche, 1976: 87). Thus cooperatives and associations (for examples, mutual companies, credit unions or consumer cooperatives) slowly broke away from the labour movement and eventually gathered under the flag of a rather depoliticised 'social economy' or 'third sector'.

8. From Marx critic of cooperative to contemporary condescendence

From a theoretical point of view, even Marx’s most detached successors agreed with him when, after 1968, workers’ cooperatives began to resurrect the practice of self-management. We may, for example, recall Gorz. It is certainly possible for workers:

‘to self-manage workshops or to self-determine working conditions or to co-determine the design of machines and the definition of tasks. Yet as a whole these remain no less determined in a heteronomous way by the social process of production or, in other words, by society insofar as it is itself a giant machine. Workers’ control (erroneously “qualified”\(^\text{13}\) as workers self-management) amounts in reality to self-determining the modalities of what has already been heteronomously determined: the workers will share and define tasks within the framework of an already existing social division of labour’ (Gorz, 1982:9).

For a worker, labour can only be a loss of their own reality and an objectification of their creations. After Marx, Gorz argued in favour of free time and a leisure society. In such a society, the material labour necessary to satisfy our physical needs is limited to its simplest expression in order to enable humanity to work on itself, as it were, which is essential to its pure social expression (Gorz, 1988). Manual labour is just as denigrated, which seems to the contemporary reader to be a somewhat hedonistic gesture at a time when an ever-increasing number of unemployed people suffer from their unemployment and many suffer from the lack of a minimum wage and from income parity – in the US, for example.

\(^{13}\) Here we have changed the translation. Gorz uses in his French text the term 'qualifié' (Adieux au prolétariat, Paris, Galilée, 1980, p. 19), which is over-translated in the English version to become 'equated'.

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In a materialist and libertarian project, unemployed people must not return to the factory but to autonomous labour. Proudhon believed that instances of self-determination can become manifest, especially within a capitalist context which is undermined from the inside. Alienated labour truly exists on a massive scale. And it contains very little emancipatory potential. But, above all, it is to be found in mass industry, where there is a boss and shareholders, where the workers are not the owners of the means of production. If we examine the experiences of their comrades outside mass industry, however, we see that the outlines of disalienated labour exist and that they currently exist in the cooperative. In this respect, Proudhon remains more faithful to the materialist project than Marx. The working class is what it is, with its cooperative wealth, its deep poverty, its lack of divine transcendence and the lack of the apparent godsend of an uncertain revolution. The question becomes: how do we exhume all the emancipatory content of the working class and its material conditions of life? The answer should be: by undertaking a sociology of the initiatives of this class.

From a classical Marxist position, we judge with condescension unemployed or intermittent workers who remain proud of the work they do for firms that deign to engage them using short-term or subsidized contracts that are precarious and unstable in every case. Proudhon’s materialism has enabled intellectuals and social movements alike to trust this class of excluded contemporaries, rather than to condemn it as alienated, because it can sometimes surprise us – as it has within the increasing number of Brazilian factories bought and self-managed by their workers (XXXX, 2013), Proudhon also provides fresh lucidity. He offers us a positive anthropological condition, even if it is impure. Society’s future form will be shaped by men whom classically ‘Marxist’ perspectives would have rapidly returned to their desire for cars, televisions, consumerist leanings, their alienation of all kinds. Erik Olin Wright notices how associational democracy, social economy and some other “pathways of social empowerment” give us no guarantees about the innate goodness of people who endorse these activities (2010: 368-369). But because Wright does not undertake a history of the idea of cooperative and popular economic experiments, already theorised by Proudhon, he calls

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them “utopias” without seeing clearly how Proudhon put this term in the same idealist dock as communism.

In 1975 Cornélius Castoriadis already noticed that the origin of the decay of Marxism and the ideological equivalent of the decay of the working movement must be sought in the rapid transformation of Marx’s ‘conception’ into a completed system, a return to the contemplative and the speculative as the dominant mode for solving the problems faced by humanity (Castoriadis, 1987: 68-70). A communist godsend that would have arranged history with a view to our freedom is indeed a godsend for a rational world, knowable from start to finish as so brutal, solid and encompassing that we suffocate. In these conditions, the problem of praxis disappears. But if we do not adopt the point of view of the completed system – if we start from a world that is not so arranged – then men have to give their individual and collective life a meaning which is not pre-assigned, and they must do so while having to deal with real conditions which neither ensure nor preclude the achievement of their project (Castoriadis, 1987: 52-53). As we can see, it is not by chance that Lefort just a few years later confessed that the stance of Socialism or Barbarism, the journal he founded with Castoriadis, was indeed a form of libertarian socialism (1979b: 15).

To Proudhon, there is no teleology or end of history as is the case with Hegel and Marx. Men make their history but they also have to accept that they make history which does not have a pre-established meaning. They compose this history mutually from what they are and do here and now in their cooperatives, assemblies or associations. They turn away from this abstract man, from the pure spirit presented by a form of labour promised to appear on the inaccessible communist horizon. Far from any a-capitalist purity which can only exist as an idea, they give back dignity to the animal labores, refusing to believe that he can be distinguished from the homo faber.

By returning pride to the worker (even after having spent thirty years welding car bodies for Renault), Proudhon enables the thinking of a libertarian experimental dynamic that is emancipatory just because it exists and is something other than capitalism, as Holloway would say (2002, 2010)
without quoting either Proudhon or the libertarian socialist movement. It is maybe because of this that Holloway reduces labour to abstract labour – that is, alienated labour – and that he suggests that “doing” (or *praxis*) is automatically something that is done outside labour (2010: 203sq.). Of course, Holloway recognizes that something like autonomous action can exist here and now. But like Gorz he thinks that it only exists against labour which is always heteronomous. The “on-going emancipation” is somewhere other than in labour. Gorz used to finish his books by advocating a “policy of time” that would reduce labour (always alienated) to free our time for family life, culture, and study (1982: 126-144; 1985: 101-110; 1988: 233-250). Today, Holloway sees “doing” in places where “labour” is criticized as (abstract) labour: workers' struggles in private factories, Seattle, Chiapas, Occupy Wall Street, Anti G-8 Summit etc. (2002: 155-165; 2010: 253-262).

Even if we agree with their critique of labour under capitalism, does it mean that we have to condemn labour in itself? If Holloway reverses the sense and the value of “abstract labour” that was for Marxists the emancipated work of the future, his stance in fact adheres to the intellectualism of the “old Marx”. Emancipation must be seen somewhere other than in the material production of an economy that is still 'dirty'. *Homo faber* is an artist who does not labour. He just thinks and uses his time for art works and theoretical cultural activities.

**Conclusion**

The libertarian materialist theory I have attempted to summarize in this paper, through the history of ideas such as “emancipation”, “work”, “cooperative, and “utopia”, starts from what exists and what is, inevitably, *inside* capitalism and *inside* a form of labour that is sometimes very prosaic labour in cooperatives. In every case, it is still material labour and not spiritual or artistic work. But that does not mean that it automatically makes workers into objects or market products.
As in the era of Proudhon, because all cooperative practices will inevitably be infected by market economics (and because their true realisation might therefore be compromised), contemporary radical Left intellectuals sometimes distance themselves from alternative initiatives, such as community-supported agriculture, new citizen credit unions, self-managed workshops, more generally, the solidarity economy (for many contemporary developed examples, see XXX, 2013, XXXX and XXXX, 2011). It is not difficult to reveal the depth to which capitalism contaminates all our material lives to the point where not a single human life is left untouched (we are all consumers, etc.). However, it is more onerous to see, against the same background, what evades capitalism within those same material lives. And yet, as Proudhon shows us, there is much of great value that does evade capitalism: we must do without the framework of massive and inevitable alienation which spares only the thinker who teaches from his ivory tower with a megaphone bought at Walmart (and made by semi-slaves in China) to combine the purity of the gesture and his spirit.

Of course, new cooperatives always run the risk of being infected by capitalist principles (private property, competition, etc.). But they at least try something rather than just ‘calling for change’ or waiting for new heteronomous jobs within factories. Of course, labour in a community-supported agricultural cooperative can be hard and painful. However, it is the same strenuous labour which, without believing that it will result in a significant and foreseeable historical development, must constitute the future of a materialism that is trying to express its principles: reciprocity, self management, etc.. What we find in Proudhon is the burgeoning of sociohistorical foundations that serve to establish a materialism which does without the latent Hegelianist intellectualism found in most of the materialist tradition today, and also in the renewal of utopianism in contemporary social economy. In order to bestow an actual theoretical component upon this 'positive' materialism, we now need to establish how contemporary suggestions (Boltanski, 2011, XXXX, 2015a and b, for examples) enrich and strengthen it. The agenda remains open.
Sources


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