"L'économie solidaire and its criticisms in the anti-globalization movement"

Essay in pragmatic sociology

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Abstract

This paper presents a phenomenological reading of Pragmatist sociology, which allows to investigate the internal dynamics and tensions within the économie solidaire (ES) movement. While the movement's identity is defined by a common imagnary of action, conflicting views on how to realise the joint vision of a "ES" subvert the formation of a coherent and more powerful voice. The imaginary of practice contrasts with the imaginary of utopia and contestation that characterised the "old" social movements, like the Marxist-Leninist labour movements, which originated in the classical left ideology (Touraine, 2002). But even if the collective representations of these groups take their starting point in a common political imaginary of practice (Castoriadis, 1975), some internal criticisms appears. The reason is that this imaginary of practice is articulated by four distinctive states of mind organized around four values. To below to the SE, each association/cooperative must be able to travel between these states of mind and to represent its specific action as a realisation of the four values. When it doesn't, it takes the risk to receive criticisms from other SE actorsd. In a second move, I'll give a example of a very concentration around one specific state of mind that I call "extrapolation" and that leads to fights. I explore how the "Mouvement pour l'Economie Solidaire" (MES) position itself within the anti-globalisation movement by using arguments drawn from the common imaginary In the various World Social Forums (Porto Alegre, Bombay) or European Social Forums (Florence, Paris, London), the MES present themselves as the practical actors of concrete, material and realistic claims while they criticise the political grammar of the alter globalisation movements, such as the French radical left movement (composed by political parties and trade unions). But these forum are mainly the space of fights between the MES actors themselves and other "representative" association of the ES : *Les Pénélopes*. Each of them accuse the other to forget some of the four fundamental values to focus about one of them that they extrapolate. Rather than trying to reconcile the four states of mind and ideological representation of the ES, the different groups are resilient to compromise their position. Could some compromises allow them to reach a better political visibility in France?

1. Introduction

In the first part of my PhD thesis, which is being published as "*Le nouvel esprit solidaire*" (March 2009, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer) I tried to show that what is now called *ES* in France is not a new phenomenon. It had its political, sociological, philosophical and economic foundations in the 19th century and particularly in the socialist associationism of Proudhon in France, or Owen in England.

What now comes under the heading of *ES* in France includes Fairtrade, organic production and local trade, LETS (local exchange trading systems), the micro-credit associations/cooperatives that finance alternative business models built by unemployed people.

In "*Le nouvel esprit solidaire*" I show that the imaginary of these associations is structured around the same values as the cooperative initiatives created in the 19th century by Proudhon,. Here, I would like to see how that common moral imaginary leads to criticism and fights. In other words, we could say that ES has a great historical and moral homogeneity but also a strong political problem today.

2. A Phenomenological Reading of Pragmatist Sociology

But first, let me introduce you the pragmatic framework I work with. Pragmatist Sociology is an alternative way of doing sociology that has been developed in France since 1985 and which is represented by the work done of researchers in the GSPM (Boltanski, Thévenot, Chiapello, Dodier, and so on...). That way of doing sociology didn't identify with classical theoretical streams of sociology in France, the critical sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. It abandons the structural point of view of Bourdieu that insisted on determining the historical and social conditions that constructed the way of thinking and acting of actors in the social world (Frère 2004).

When Boltanski/Thevenot left the Bourdieu school of thought, they became closer to Latour's actor-network-theory: they abandoned a transcendent point of view (like the habitus of Bourdieu) and instead follow the actors in their social network. Pragmatist sociology takes from Latour's approach the prescription to follow actors on the ground and their articulations about everyday life. They are capable of reasoning in the same way as scientists, develop hypotheses, test hypothesis in reality, and so on. This was of course influenced by ethnomethodology.

The term "pragmatism" wanted to emphasise the critical competences of actors in order to model them (because actors don't have the time to do so themselves). Rather than seeing social actors as incapable of seeing the power relations that they were subjected to as a result of ideological forms that conceal their reasons of action, pragmatist sociology has developed a pluralist philosophy of contingency that accepts that actors have competences of judgement and justification, and that they are capable of becoming aware of their actions regarding different points of view. These points of view become rationalised and intellectualised through justifications.

In opposition to the **critical sociology** of Bourdieu that consists in revealing and critiquing common sense to show that common sense is always constructed by domination, Pragmatism suggest a **sociology of the critique** where the criticism of people are taken seriously as something else than the expression of an illusion (Frère 2005).

The pragmatist sociologists have shown that in everyday life the individuals are capable of a critical point of view. This is based on a framework of a social world that is constituted by different orders of worth (or *cité*, a moral and political construction like the Aristotelian *Polis*).

In my work, I use a synthesis between what the DLJ calls the cité but I don't use them directly. As I have tried to show in an other book about *epistemology and philosophy of social*

sciences, the interest of pragmatic sociology is that it is not interested in how a theoretical system is reproduced. Categories and concepts are not important but what is important is to find a way to conceptualise metaphysical representation of the world in the everyday live. The heuristic dynamic of the model is important, not the model itself.

What interested me when I interviewed people was not only to interview actors of the ES to learn about their justifications for their activity. I quickly saw that this produced arguments and justifications that rested on a surface level. It produced a stereotypical representation of anti-capitalist arguments. My aim was to really go beyond this and to understand the way of life that people live, to understand how they perceive the world. This allowed me to grasp the inconsistencies, critics and contradictions that were behind the consistent and coherent imaginary of the ES.

I realised that with phenomenology I could combine representations of the way of living in the world **and** justification about that way of living. That's why I'm talking about the phenomenological concept of intentionnal state of mind. **State of mind** is a way of thinking the world that both includes living and relating to the world as well as a reflective, discursive state of justification.

I draw on **Husserl** notion of intentionality. **Intentionality** means that a conscience is a stream that projects you in the world and attaches you to the things in the world. Such a stream can have different colorations, which mediats the actors relationships towards the world. Intentionality is a way of experiencing the world. There are different inentionalities : desire, rationality, being bored, scariness etc (Frère 2006b, 2007).

Scheler draws on the notion of intentionality and in 1916 "Christianism as anticapitalism" he argues that the dominant state of mind of people is the capitalism. People see the world in a utilitarian way with the will of appropriation. Relation conscious-object is modulate by desire of possession. The only discours allowed to things in the intentional link our conscious draw with it is : "see how much profit you can draw from me" (Frère 2006a).
According to Scheler, Christianity is a different state of mind to see the world with Christian love. Of course, what interests me is not Christianity but this concept of intentional state. It inspired me to conceive representations of actors.

3. The states of mind and their extrapolations

I draw on the notion of the "imaginary" as used by the political philosopher C. Castoriadis to describe the synthetic vision of the world of the ES. I will here simplify how I use it. The imaginary is based on 4 values that are related to 4 "states of mind". Each "state of mind" is a way of seeing the world that is committed to a particular value.

The first "state of mind" is political engagement. If one adopts that "state of mind" the moral value that counts is the practical instantiation of libertarian democracy as understood as a pure form of direct democracy where each actor has an equal voice.Decisions are taken collectively. **Here it is fundamental to have a political discourse in all public spaces (like anti-globalisation forum, as Porto Allegre) to show how such form of ideal political organisation is legitimate as it rests on economic action**. This libertarian discourse rests on a practice that is in opposition to the usual radical left that does not go beyond a theoretical articulation. The radical left quotes Marx but without actually trying to change the world through a new form of economic organisation that really changes the living conditions of the poor.

the second state of mind is situationism. Being in a situationist state of mind neither democracy nor political discourse is important, even less participation in political manifestations as Porto Allegre, but the actual situation of poor people. This is represented by the leaders of the situationist movement Debord et Vaneigem for who each person is capable of creating and changing his own situation and creating his own subjectivity, even the those who are most

vulnerable to the domination of consumerist ideology or to social and economic domination. For the actors of the ES even if a person is unemployed or socially excluded he/she is still capable to self-determination and to create an economic activity that allows him to escape a state of misery.

A third state of mind that is invoked by actors of the ES is what I call <u>technique</u>. This refers to associative forms that respect the principles of collective self-management, elimination of organisational hierarchy (the French name is auto-gestion). Each worker in the cooperative is an owner with equal share of the organisation, has a vote in the administrative committee that exists without a leader. Actors whose are reasoning within a technical "state of mind" must create a technical organizational model to be sure that everybody will be at some point in time the leader of the association or cooperative. .

The state of mind "<u>Philia</u>" attaches particular importance to the human dimension of the solidarity economy. In contrast to the market economy that is composed by businesses who's first and foremost goal is that of profit maximisation, "philia" rests on relations between people, on camaraderie, friendship and responsibility. While these values can be found in traditional businesses operating according to the market logic, in the solidarity economy structured on "philia", these become the *raison d'etre* of the organisation itself. When "philia" is the dominant state of mind of a solidarity economy organisation the relation between persons resembles a family relationship. This relation goes beyond reciprocity (Mauss M., [1923-1924]) in the sense that people give to each other without expecting remuneration from each other. The aim is to feel good with others in the association in a climate of comradeship.

<u>The model defines the boundaries of who is recognised as a legitimate actor in the ES.</u> Actors are recognized as actors of the ES when they show "ability" to travel between different state of minds

I call extrapolation the moment when people fail to travel between different states of minds, but rely exclusively on one state of mind and realise a single value while neglecting the others. Extrapolation causes a critical reaction of other actors in the ES movement. The notion of extrapolation reveals the dispute between actors in the ES.

When a cooperative is accused to be in a " <u>philia</u> extrapolation", it is accused of doing Christian charity work, like "resto du Coeur". Giving free food or clothes to poor people is no longer recognised by other actors as legitimate participants as they lack political engagement because they don't mind to suggest themselves as a new model of economic organisation to the entire world, different than the one suggested by the couple capitalist exploitation/charity with looser (thought the Social state). But that cooperative misses also the competences of poor and the fact that they can self-develop *here and now* the means to change their situation. And, last but note least, it forgets the auto-gestion (democratic management) of the organisations of the poor.

When a cooperative is accused to be in a technical extrapolation that means that its focusing on autogestion and democratic participation has become technocratic and institutionalized (it is often the case of far trade). This kind of cooperative is accused to look like the established third sector (social economy) where each cooperator have indeed a voice in the organization but doesn't mind with the situation of the unemployed people (situationnism) and the suggestion to contribute to the new social movement to have a political voice (engagement).

The cooperative that is accused to be in a <u>situationnist</u> extrapolation is the one who focus to much on the help to bring to poor people to build with their own business to take them out their unemployed situation. This kind of focusing draw to create a kind of local micro-capitalist economy (it is often the case of micro-finance and micro-consultancy as the *Boutiques de gestion*). Here, the accused forgets solidarity values as political engagement, autogestion (democratic management and benefit sharing) or friendship relation that creates social links.

But the example of extrapolation that I want to present shows the dispute between two associations that accuse each other of extrapolation of the state of mind of <u>political engagement</u>. Each association reproaches the other to pretend to defend in public spaces like the anti-globalisation forum the model of and impose the political-libertarian model of SE. Within that model, the associations organise themselves on a political level without power. Each association

reproaches the other to not really defending this model but by confiscating the voice of actors in the SE and pretend to represent them. They pretend to defend a political-libertarian model of SE while neglecting the actors on the ground who are representing the state of mind of situationsim. They just confiscate their parole to gain a greater force in public forums, without really taking seriously their political competences. This neglects also the state of mind Philia as it neglects that they both need to find a peaceful and comradeship with the other if they want to show a unit representation of Solidarity Economy.

Here, when you are doing an extrapolation, you begin to resemble to the party on the extreme left. The critique is that the actors of the extreme left (as the LCR or the trade unions) talk in the name of workers. One creates a kind of communist dictatorship that is exactly opposed to the libertarian democracy of the solidarity economy. In that democracy every actor is supposed to be all allowed to have, from time to time, the right (and the obligation) to talk in the name of the all solidarity economy (in France) and to represent it on the public sphere.

Extrapolation
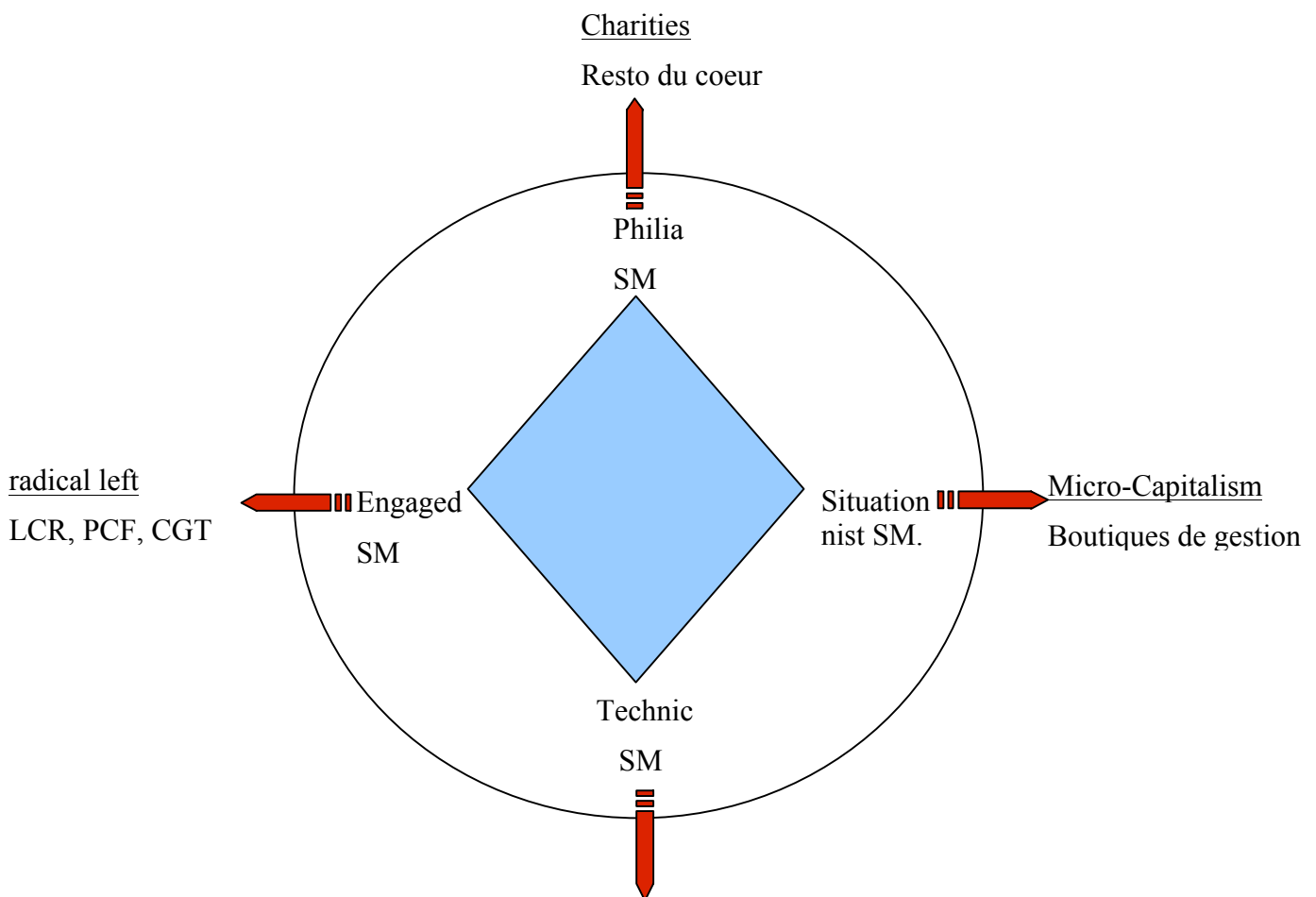
Extrapolation

Space of correct représentations of the world and argumentations based on the four values.

Values of the States of Mind (SM)

1   *Philia* : comradship
2   *Engagement* : militantism (écologique, politique, etc)
3   *Technique* : autogestion (self management)
4   *situationnisme*: créativity

4. The Pénélopes incident, or the issue of representation

This extrapolation is illustrated by the clash between the association called 'les Pénélopes' and the Mouvement pour l'Economie Solidaire (the main network of SE organization in France) during the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (31 January to 5 February 2002). The background for the confrontation was variously presented as follows:

Sophie from *Les Pénélopes* Act I: At the first forum in Porto Alegre, les Pénélopes, we had started some 5 or 6 days earlier thinking "we are not going to the end of the world just like that, in a social forum, without meeting people (with whom we could symptathise)". We strated earlier, **we had established connections. We were already very interested in ES practised by women because it is a way of resisting globalisation, patriarchal society, la violence**, etc. We met 2 of the cooperatives, it was great! We filme dit all, we took pictures of us all together, then we decided to set up partnerships with those cooperatives seeing as we are in touch cooperatives over here. Some of us are active partners in cooperatives. This is act I.

Act II: at the second Porto Alegre forum (in January-February 2002, author's note), we thought : we're going to set up a workshop for these cooperatives to meet… and thus try and start a network. **Not a network of representatives, no, of actual active partners**. And since it's a world forum, it's fantastic, there'll be lots of people from all over the world. And indeed there were lots of people, including MES people. (They) **were very late, they hadn't proposed a workshop, so there was no possibility of their having a workshop, so** a member of MES negotiated with les Pénélopes for them to participate in our workshop. We said all right but could agree on a title, so we said "we'll just share the allotted time, you can have one hou rand a half." They were first and launched a regular attack on Pénélopes (the speaker quotes the MES delegate, AN) : "*it's outrageous, you cannot set up an international network in ES, it's much too soon, anyway you are new in the field, you have no antecedents, we were there first*". Imagine! In our workshop! There were people of the Brazilian Workers' Party, feminists involved in ES we had asked to come because they were quite interested (those people the speaker said they had sympathised during the first forum, AN**). And what do they do ?! They sart a dogs fight,** they **take over our right to speak.** People had come to say things and instead they attended an undignified brawl (…). We were very angry (…). This was repeated at the European Social Forum and this was just a clash between people.#

Here The Penelopes suppose that the MES is in an extrapolation in the State of mind of engagement : they just want to represent alone the ES and they forget to be kind (**They start a dogs fight**), they confiscate the voice of actors in situation, the brezilian women of the cooparatives (*they take over our right to speak*) **and so on...**

Here is the justification put forward by involved members of MES: Les Pénélopes, that's bullshit. In Porto Alegre we intended to set up an international network with our initiatives (involving women, AN). We stopped because they had done it, against all advice to the contrary, they had done it. Pénélopes, we keep having problems with them. In Porto Alegre we had a workshop with them. It also ended in a fight. Les Pénélopes **consider that they speak in the name of actors in ES.** *I* say no. If you want us to work together, you do your job, but you are not agents, it's not the same. (…). At that common workshop we eventually insulted each other. We said "let us set up a common network of women in ES", they said "les Pénélopes must run it!". There were 100 people in the room. Who said no. They said all the same. (…). They didn't care about what was there before. It led to mutual abuse on a grand scale (…). **I've been**

doing this for 20 years (working within ES), it took me time. You see, some people just pop up one morning, and because ES is in, they are ready to kill ! »

Such personal conflicts are one of the illustration of the major handicap rejecting a formal political representation results in. We can indeed assume that an agreement between the two parties on this issue would have considerably strengthened the visibility and cohesion of ES. Yet such personal fallouts between activists only means that the Pénélopes and the MES each turn away without acknowledging that neither can legitimately claim to speak both in its own name and in the name of ES. Here, the MES explain that the Penelopes extrapolate their engagement state of mind in the same way that the Penelopes did about them. Penelopes are accused to forget that they have to link friendly with other ES members as asked by the philia state of mind (instead of that, *they are ready to kill*). Opposite to the MES, they ignore the real members of the ES whose are working with unemployed people in the locality : French cities and villages. That is the exigence of the transition to the situationniste state of mind (*you are not actors, let us set up a common network of women in ES*).

 One of the MES leaders who had been involved in the Pénélopes incident wrote in a magazine - without referring to any clash - that it had been difficult for MES and its propositional rather then denouncing position to be accepted at Porto Alegre in 2002. Yet 10 % of the forum were occupied by international ES (production and handicraft cooperatives, biodynamic food stalls, etc.). It regularly appears she claims that Trotskyite forces oppose their veto. She writes **: "**Such call to resistance, such wave of interest in the civil society for social forums "naturally breed envy. We can see new apparatchiks pop up who would like to control the movement in the interest of some chapels. Their interest in the movement is only as fishing pond for militants not in their unique dynimising power. This tension can keenly be felt in the ESF, already in Florence then in Paris-St-Denis. The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) calls for Local Social Forums; the French Communist Party (PCF) and related associations (the major trade union Centrale Générale des Travailleurs/CGT, the women's association Femmes solidaires) are everywhere to be seen (…). Trade union employees try to control the secretariat of the organisation, i.e. the forum's organising body that meets once a week (…) Forums are wavering between the heritage of the international workers' Association and the Leninist heritage. On a global as on a national level the Leninist parenthesis is most difficult to close and still hampers creativeness and thus the possibility of constructing other political alternatives."[1]

Among the new apparatchiks trying to "recuperate" the movement for a different globalisation we can of course lump Pénélopes who similarly wanted to invade ES. To meet the demands of their "libertarian" political imagination MES people equate their solidarity movement with the antiglobalisation movement and oppose them to those they perceive as enemies (PCF, LCR, trade unions)

Conclusion

Still, why should ES be more legitimately represented by MES than by some of those "apparatchiks" ? How can it be proved that MES stakeholders in solidarity are more attached to solidarity than stakeholders in the cooperative network set up by Envelopes ?

The paradoxical ambivalence results from its network model of SE. As Castells wrote in *the informational society* : its main strength is "a form of organisation and intervention in networks without a coordinating centre, a form which characterises new social activisms, and which both reflects and runs against the networking logic developed within the capitalist information society".

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[1] . Hersent M., 2003, « Les dynamiques des forums sociaux », dans *Cultures en mouvement, n°* 62, pp. 31-33.

On the other hand, "it is this elusiveness specific to networks of social changes and the very absence of a centre that make it so difficult to detect and identify new gestating identity projects" (1999, p. 435).

In conclusion MES and Penelopes are right in the critics that they send to each other. Both, MES and Penelopes can be accuse to forget to think in two states of mind : philia and situationnism.

But in my opinion, the more important state of mind that they are forgetting is the "autogestion" one : If they wouldn't want to extrapolate the engagement state of mind that put both close to the archaic left movement (that is confiscating the voice) they would put forward ballots, votes and turning power of representation enough candidates to its board,as asked by the technic state of mind and its autogestion value.

Because they keep rejecting all political forms (political parties, trade unions, or federations), they refuse to consider the fully acceptable and even necessary nature of power when it is democratic and turning. Perhaps Giddens was not entirely wrong when he said # the utopian realism of the third sector must acknowledge the inevitable nature of power and stop seeing its use as inevitably evil. Power in the larger sense of the term is how we can achieve things. There can be a positive power when it is not used towards hoarding caste priviledges (TNC, etc.) but takes all citizens into account# (Giddens, pp. 162-169). In the local associations of ES the power is running between workers (poor people), organisers, stockholders, financiers etc. But it doesn't seem to be the case on the politic level : On the anti-globalization manifestations the ES is always the same / MES or Penelopes.

This is already the case with those who extrapolate and claim that they speak in the name of ES, which only one French author, Draperi, so far seems to have noticed "While they hold a project for ES, these active groups have not yet succeeded in associating recipient populations to the political auto-management of their initiatives in a massive and cooperative way" (2001, p. 60). They do so at a local level, when their political aspirations have not yet taken them away to social forums. It is next to and with marginalised people, taking their civic aspirations into account, that proximity services, fair trade initiatives, non monetary exchange networks and other similar solidarity structures have developed. The MES leaders claim that they represent these same voices in the forums. Even if a federative process was set up so that their representation become legitimate (instead of being a mere extrapolation), how can the need to stay active among marginalised people prevail upon the wish to defend ES in some arena or other, whether they are political or civic ? For while members of the MES or of other movements that claim to develop ES recognise their right to speak up, it is still a fact, as Draperi notes, that those marginalised people with whom they work in the neighbourhoods are hardly ever to be found in the workshops of anitglobalisation forums.

The problem is of course that MES and Penelopes have both to transit in the phila and situationnist state of mind to realise that they could have a better human relationship (mainly in front of the new spirit of capitalist business for witch the ideology of power of friendship work is very fashion). The problem is also that they have to present more to each other the local cooperatives in Brasilia and France they are working with. But the have also mainly to organise the autogestion work of the movement to share the representation voice with real ES workers whose are staying in cities and countries in their both countries. They have to be agree to reconfigure the networks into a genuine federation that respects turning delegation procedures as Proudhon for example asked to the International organisation of workers) when he wrote against Marx and the idea the party as an incarnation of the proletarian voice

The underlying but of course not explicit question is the guidance of the movement on a global (or in our case national) scale (…). The same people who inveigh against hierarchical or pyramidal structures, who promote libertarian networks, transparency, inclusion, direct democracy etc., are also the first, whatever they may say, to try and impulse excluding logics, and even structures which they think they can secretly control. Behind this alleged informality we always

find an influential kernal, sometimes the aura of a leader who likes to parade as a common activist, but most of the time a preexisting network consisting of a limited number of people or organisations. While formal structures have identified modes of decisions, so public responsibilities and the possibility of recalling mandates, the so-called informal structures are anonymous and hide behind pompous titles which makes it possible for them to claim a fake representativity; by definition, they are not accountable to anyone (Cassen, 2003).

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