

The Libertarian Imaginary of the Solidarity Economy Movement

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This paper demonstrates the value of French pragmatist sociology, and particularly the methodological device of a ‘grammar’ to articulate the normative macro-elements that underpin the organizational principles of the solidarity economy movement in France. Our grammatical analysis demonstrates that the loosely coupled movement is held together by a shared libertarian imaginary. We identify as its core four principles about an alternative organization of economic activity: creativity, conviviality, self-management and political activism; and we trace their historical roots in 19th century libertarian socialism and their renaissance in radical social movements in the 1970s. Analyzing the theorization of the libertarian imaginary provided by Proudhon in the 19th and movement protagonists in the 20th century, we argue that the values of the libertarian imaginary have become recombined into a composite construct of complementary, yet potentially conflicting grammatical elements. Presenting a case of a solidarity economy organization, we illustrate how organizational practices are evaluated through a grammatical lens, but also how the movement can lose its

critical edge when the grammar is 'extrapolated'. 'Extrapolation' offers an alternative explanation for movement instrumentalization, a frequently observed and deplored phenomenon in social movements, and suggests that it takes place not by co-optation of an external and conflicting value logic, but by over-emphasizing a value that is constitutive of the grammar itself.

Social movements have lately been widely celebrated as progressive forces of social transformation. They are an interesting cultural phenomenon that shows how people resist structures of domination and engage in collective action in order to realize values, beliefs and political orientations. But social movements do not arise out of an ideological vacuum. Rather, they are carriers of political and philosophical ideas, beliefs and values that are expressions of long intellectual and political traditions.

Social movements researchers have placed socially shared meanings and beliefs at the center of social movement activity. Particularly 'new social movement' theorists in the 80s (Touraine, 1981, 1985; Cohen 1985; Melucci, 1985, 1989; Castells, 1997) began to appreciate that participants not only sought to achieve political goals but also cultural recognition for new identities and lifestyles. While the importance of shared meanings, beliefs and values have become unquestionable, it still remains unclear where they come from. Indeed, as Polletta and Jasper criticize, collective identity, defined as "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category practice, or institution" (2001, p. 285), has become a sort of black box, or a "residual category" accounting for any action beyond calculative interest. But, effectively, still little is known "about the cultural building blocks that are used to construct collective identities" (2001, p. 299). Other researchers have settled on the suggestion that activists strategically 'frame' identities in order to package messages and mobilize participants as resources (Snow et al., 1986; Benford and Snow,

1992). The framing literature seems to suggest that values can be intentionally created, shaped and activated to further goals of movement activists.

The solidarity economy movement (Hereafter SEM) (Laville 2007; 2008; 2009; Davidson 2008; Frère 2009) is an example *par excellence* that shows how an imaginary can unify dispersed social movement activists in their practices and justifications. As a critical response to market liberalization and unfettered economic globalization, the SEM consists of a network of grass roots activist that create local organizations that realize the utopia of an alternative economy beyond profit and instrumental rationality. The striking fact is that even though local activists are geographically dispersed and engage in a variety of different, seemingly unconnected activities ranging from fair trade to childcare, they all adhere to a distinctive set of organizational principles that define how projects should be organized in order to qualify as SEM initiatives. What exactly do these principles consist of? And where does this distinctive identity come from?

Recently, researchers paid more attention to historical legacies of social movements. As Schneiberg's (2007, p. 47) analysis of American cooperatives suggests, the institutional historical 'paths not taken' "represent resources for endogenous institutional change, including revival, reassembly, redeployment and subsequent elaboration of alternative logics within national capitalism". Even though the original social movements have faded, their organizational, cultural and institutional traces remain visible as organizational principles of alternative institutional forms (Schneiberg, King and Smith 2007).

Our analysis builds upon the question of what it is that allows social movements to persist over time and recognize a collective identity despite disparate practices and organizational formulations. We borrow the notion of 'imaginary', as put forward by the political philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis. An 'imaginary' can be defined as the symbolic institution

creating the collective identity of a social group. It is “this primary structuring device, source for what presents itself again and again as non-debatable and non-debated meaning, is nothing other than the imaginary of society. It underpins the articulations and distinctions of what matters and what does not matter.” (1975, p. 219, own translation). In this article, we analyze the imaginary of the SEM and suggest that it is fixed by a stable grammar, which actors tend to respect in their practices and justifications when they identify with the movement. But we will also explore how tensions and conflicts can arise as a result of this grammar that is held in common to explain the lack of political unity that has been observed.

In order to identify the moral grammar, we draw on French pragmatist sociology, possibly the most original research program in contemporary French thought¹. Since the recent translation of “On Justification” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]) it has attracted the attention of Anglophone theorists (i.e. Lamont and Thévenot 2000; Biggart and Beamish 2003; Denis, Langley and Rouleau 2007; Eulriet 2008; Friedland 2009; Stark 2009). Keeping from Bourdieu’s genetic structuralism (1979) the idea of meta-level orders, pragmatist sociology offers the potential of a “micro-sociology with a macro-cultural crust” (Silber 2003). We first conceptualize the notion of ‘grammar’ in French pragmatist sociology as the cognitive syntax of a moral imaginary. We then show how the notion of grammar can be used as a methodological tool to identify and analyze the meta-level cultural elements that are enacted upon in local settings. To abstract the pure form of the grammar, we draw on philosophical articulations of recurrent themes and values found in the empirical material. A grammatical analysis here places particular emphasis on the intellectual history of political and philosophical ideas.

This reveals that the moral imaginary that characterizes the SEM is not an arbitrary theoretical construct that was formulated a posteriori to justify action. Instead, it had its political, sociological, philosophical and economic foundations in the 19th century libertarian socialism,

as articulated by Proudhon in France (Frère 2009). Its imaginary magma has survived the political failure of the socialist economy and experienced a renaissance different social counter movements in the 1970s, which inspired the creation of the first solidarity economy organizations. While previous research has recognized the historical anchorage (Gueslin 1987; Desroche 1991; Demoustier 2001), it is less clear how the movement's imaginary is constituted and how it creates a collective identity “as an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category practice, or institution” (Polletta and Jasper 2001, p. 285). Moreover, despite the common historical roots and collective identity, commentators have observed with disappointment that the solidarity economy as a social movement is unable to organize itself in contradistinction to the classical forms that it avoids to be, which prevents it to more forcefully put forward a convincing alternative to capitalism (Caillé, 2003).

Presenting the case of Pole, we thirdly develop the notion of extrapolation to theorize the way in which the radical motifs of the libertarian imaginary loose their critical edge and degenerate into micro-capitalism. We observe how actors who want to belong to the SEM seek to respect grammatical rules in order to be respected as legitimate representatives. But SEM activists are prone to extrapolate particular grammatical values, which then come into conflict with the other elements constitutive of the grammar.

The Solidarity Economy Movement (SEM)

Consisting of a variety of socially and politically progressive organizations, the SEM can be seen as what Spicer and Böhm (2007) describe as an infra-political social movement. It comprises a multiplicity of independent, local-level organizations that are not formally organized but ideologically united in a vision to combat the capitalist hegemony through creating alternative forms of doing business. Four sectors can be considered as representative

examples of SEM's key spectrum in France: non-monetary exchanges (e.g. Local Exchange and Trading Systems), Fair Trade, micro-finance associations and those organizations that attract the attention of this article: proximity services and those organizations that support their creation.

According to estimates, Fair Trade involves about 60,000 volunteers and 4,000 jobs in Europe (Laville 2009, p. 108). Global sales of Fairtrade labeled goods exceeded EUR 2.9 billion by the end of 2008 (FLO 2009). Whereas Fairtrade Labeling represents a vertical South-North exchange, horizontal relations of fair exchange within Southern and within Northern countries are gaining importance. In France, notably about a hundred "Associations for the Maintenance of Peasant Agriculture"ⁱⁱ are engaged in promoting local exchange by linking consumer groups to local farmers. As a result, an estimate of 100 000 consumers co-decide on seasonal planning and production methods. They pay a fair price and sometimes even become involved in local farm work as volunteers (Laville 2007, p. 88; 2008, p.125).

Proximity services are local 'self-help' activities to improve everyday life, such as care for the elderly or cultural and environmental neighborhood services. A prominent example is the growing number of self-managed associations that offer day-care for children in the parents' immediate environs. They accommodate 15% of all children in Scandinavian countries or 19% in the UK (Laville, 2009, p. 101-104). To support the creation of proximity services, a number of solidarity economy consulting services have emerged that assist social and proximity entrepreneurs in the creation of their project.

The most well known example of non-monetary exchange is that of LETS, an alternative economy operating by virtue of fictitious money. It counts 1,5 million members in 2500 associations in about 30 countries, most notably in Japan, Latin America and Europe. In France alone there are 315 associations that involve over 30 000 members (Ibid., p. 116-7)

who exchange goods and services by virtue of alternative money, which functions in parallel to the official money people often lack. Non-monetary exchanges also include knowledge exchange networksⁱⁱⁱ counting 600 members in France. Their purpose is to match individual offers and demands for knowledge, ranging from classical subjects such as literature to practical know-how in information technology. In this spirit, some associations also organize knowledge exchanges among leaders of solidarity economy associations (see MB2 2001).

Also micro-credit organizations have experienced a global surge. In France, it is estimated that 300 000 citizens have practiced ‘solidarity saving’ involving 1,3 million euros in 2006. The French Federation of micro-credit states they have supported the creation of 350 enterprises and 1800 jobs (Laville 2008, p. 120; 2009, p. 113-5).

While each of these sector engages in different practices, the solidarity economy movement has a unifying imaginary the historical anchorage of which we will briefly outline in the following section.

Proudhon’s libertarian socialism as the historical anchorage of a libertarian imaginary

The socialist cooperative movement was one of the two forms of socialism that emerged in the mid 19th century. While Marxist socialism was committed to the idea of disruptive revolution towards state communalism, libertarian socialism rejects Marxist notions of linear and inevitable historical progressions (as an abstract romantic-utopia). Instead of formulating a theoretical and irenic revolution of state socialism, the main thinker of libertarian socialism, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, suggests to focus on the progressive anarchist revolution of the economy that is taking place in cooperatives “here and now”. Having coined the famous phrase “Property is Theft” (1944 [1840]), Proudhon was a key theorist of mutualism, an anarchist school of thought, which wanted to create a society where each person possessed means of production. Proudhon believed that decentralization of power and public

sovereignty could best be realized through anti-authoritarian, self-managed cooperatives, unions and community associations, which allow its members to be authentic, human and social.

A corner stone of libertarian socialism was the establishment of the “Caisse de crédit mutuel” (1923 [1851], 1983 [1846]), a democratically run mutual-credit union. This was based on the principle of providing credit at a minimal interest rate for the benefits of its members rather than for the enrichments of bankers themselves. Supporting local cooperatives, the mutual-credit union can be seen as the ancestors of contemporary forms of micro-credit.

Proudhon further endeavored to create a popular bank (“Banque du peuple”, 1977 [1865]) in 1949 that would operate based on an alternative currency of locally created credits. Together with the National Equitable Labour Exchange founded in 1932 by the social reformer Robert Owen in England, this was the first Local Exchange Trading System (LETS) in history.

Proudhon also formulated the main principles of economic mutualism. These were applied by the first cooperatives of production (such as “le Canuts” in Lyon, France) or consumption (such as the “Union des Travailleurs”), which linked consumers and producers in the spirit of local fair-trade and self-help.

Proudhon’s writings provide a lucid synthesis of the principles of libertarian socialism, which concurs also with the socialist vision of anarchists such as Kropotkin and Bakunin. As Frère (2009) proposes, these are centered on four main values.

First, even if Proudhon (1923 [1851]) did not use the word ‘self-management’, one of the main principles was that every association and cooperative, independent of size, must be self-managed. The worker must own the means of production and have ownership rights to the company in which he works. He should receive a share of the profits proportional to his involvement, participate in decision-making and, above all, acquire a versatile learning in

order to carry out different tasks and thus avoid being the victim of a parceling and alienating division of work.

Second, conviviality is highly valuable to enable the flourishing of cooperatives. In order to theorize the convivial spirit reigning in cooperatives, Proudhon, even if profoundly non-religious, draws on early Christian texts with the aim to render the foundational principle of his libertarian-economic theory of mutuality explicit. “Jesus preached universal brotherhood without distinction of Jews or by generalizing the law of Moses: you will lend to your Israelite or foreigner brother, without interest. The author of the Gospel closed the age of selfishness, the age of nationality and opened the period of love, the era of humanity. Without a doubt he developed with more energy than it has ever done before the famous principle: “Do unto others as yourself.” But it never came into his mind to organize mutuality economically” (1923 [1951], pp. 153-154).

This points to the third value that is present in Proudhon: the spontaneity of political organization of cooperatives. As he writes on cooperatives, “these companies were formed spontaneously and against the principles of bourgeois society. [They] exclude the capitalist buy-out and are based on the principles of participation and mutuality” (1977 [1865], p. 80). Because their principles are those of direct democracy that establishes itself spontaneously, cooperatives must also serve as a role model for the political organization of society. From economic, mutuality must also become political. Here, Proudhon sets a federal principal of spontaneous political association against state socialism.

As commentators note, the state owes its existence to “the erroneous hypothesis of impersonality and physical, intellectual and moral inertia of the masses. It assumes in principle that society is a being devoid of spontaneity and unity, unable to organize itself and act for itself.” (Bancal, 1970, p. 215). The principle of state further ignores the autonomy and

capacity of society and its constituent groups to political self-government in the same way as capitalist property disregards the autonomy and capacity of economic self-government. Federal political organization emerges when real communities, independent and shareholders decide to coordinate their efforts to a higher level. The task of a political party, if at all, should be reduced to that of group coordination and support.

Finally, it is the radical creativity, which cooperatives develop in order to escape poverty, that forms the fourth cardinal value celebrated in the work of Proudhon. He recounts in the *Handbook of the Speculator* (1857, p. 68), a sociological study he conducted of worker associations directed by master craftsmen: “We visited the worker associations with Beslay. We obtained the directory of their situation since its origin [for the most established in 1848] until 31 December 1853, then from 1853 until 1856. We studied their internal discipline and principles that were more or less expressed in their acts, which govern all. We aimed at analyzing the facts, more eloquent in their spontaneity than theories. We conclude that these worker associations are spaces of creation, new principle, new model [...]. This movement springs not from utopian theories, but economic necessity. It must successively invade all branches of production.”

For Proudhon, each worker who creates a cooperative participates, both politically and economically, in radical revolution. Even if, as Ansart (1970) reminds us, Proudhon grants too much revolutionary possibilities to the creativity of a workers' elite, this idealization allows him to maintain that cooperatives provide the adequate organizational form to move from alienation to creation.

The imaginary magma of the 19th century libertarian cooperative movement has survived the political failure of the socialist economy. The anarchist spirit of libertarianism experienced an influential renaissance in the 1960s and 1970s counter-culture movements; and, as we argue,

live fourth in the organizational principles of SEM cooperatives and associations, which resemble in a striking fashion their 19th century predecessors. First, the situationist movement celebrated human creativity as the basis for a “Revolution of Everyday Life” (Vaneigem 1967; see also Debord 1992 [1957]). Second, the libertarian theory of the radical left group “Socialism or Barbary”, which was created in 1949 by Lefort (1979 [1958]) and Castoriadis (1979[1974])^{iv}, theorized the spontaneous political dimension of everyday life of workers and of their organizations. Both intellectual currents had strong repercussions in the sixty-eight students revolts in Paris. Some of these students left Paris to create the first solidarity economy communities in the countryside. These communities were furthermore influenced by the workers’ self-management movement, which radically experimented with novel practices at the workplace (Rosanvallon 1976; Gorz 1973). A fourth inspiration came from the ideas of the Christian anarchist movement, which sought to conceptualize a post-industrial production system based on conviviality and social links in micro-enterprises (Illich 1973; Ellul 1988).

French Pragmatist Sociology as a framework for a ‘grammatical analysis’

The French pragmatist framework (Boltanski 1990; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]; Lemieux 2009) Has evolved from the Political and Moral Sociology Group (GSPM) at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris since the 1980s. It turns against the structuralist assumptions of Bourdieu's critical sociology, the dominant paradigm in 1980s French sociology (for a comparison see Benatouil 1999, Frère 2004) while it remains concerned with social critique and its relation to sociology (Boltanski 2009a).

For our purposes, we draw on the pragmatists’ notion of ‘grammar’. The pragmatist school of thought is embedded in an intellectual tradition that privileges the study of situated behavior in indeterminate social situations. In this sense it can be seen as another route to the micro-

sociological project that has found its expression in Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (1967), and which seeks to identify the grammar of common sense in order to comprehend how people make sense of their everyday world. But the pragmatist research program also assumes that "critique presupposes normative fulcra" (ibid., p. xi), which gives substance to justifications, but equally subjects them to "requirements resembling those of a grammar" (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991], p. 140). While ethnomethodology focuses on the role of common sense, or 'savoir faire' in routine operations that people effect automatically in day-to-day life, French pragmatist sociology assumes that the normative fulcrum that underpins basic cultural frames is instantiated in social life through criticism. By making criticism the object of enquiry, pragmatist sociology, for this reason also termed a 'sociology of criticism' emphasizes the critical competences of actors to recognize and reflect upon the multiple orders of worth that co-exist and co-construct social reality. Criticism arises from the interpretation of situations according to normative principles of the common good and becomes rationalized and intellectualized through justifications. Justifications are hence not approached with skepticism searching for the self-replicating mechanisms of the habitus, which operates hidden behind discursive articulations as in Bourdieu's critical sociology, but serve as the starting point to study the political and moral grammars that motivate people's behavior.

Via a focus on criticism and justifications, the framework hence brings back the question of values, as motivations and constraints of action, onto the centre stage of sociological inquiry: "In the realm of moral values, it was a question of taking the normative principles and ideals that people claim to adhere to seriously, without reducing it a priori to an interplay of forces over which actors have no control." (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007 [1999], p. xi). This renews the sociological perspective by freeing up theoretical space to understand disputes as manifestations of competing values – or common goods.

Methodology: Extracting a Grammar from the Field

Data

Our empirical data is drawn from a larger research project on the SEM in France that was carried out between 2002 and 2006. During the qualitative field study, 25 organizations were selected from each of the four key sectors, including relevant meta-organizations. These organizations were located in various regions of France, including Paris, Marseille, Toulouse, Lille, Lyon, Dijon and some smaller cities. In each organization, an average of three semi-structured open-ended interviews (between one and six) were conducted in order to account for the voices of different positions within each association (realizing a total of 75 interviews). Interviews lasted on average one hour and a half and sometimes extended into much longer informal conversations. All interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed. In about half of the selected organization, data gathering was preceded or extended through participant observation that lasted up to a full week. In addition, we collected and analyzed about 300 texts, including academic articles whose authors were frequently SEM activists, but also internal position papers and newsletters.

As pragmatist sociology indicates, actors often have a reflexive understanding of the situation that resembles that of the sociologist. The difference is that practitioners often do not have the time to express them. The interviews we conducted carved a space for actors' reflexivity. But the sharing of daily routines through participant observation methods was an important factor to establish a relationship of trust with local actors that encouraged them to reflect critically on their concrete local practices. The questionnaire was understood as a fluid guide that allowed participants to take time to reflect on topics that they found important. Often it was when the discussion departed from a pre-formulated question-answer scheme that interviewees disclosed their fundamental moral judgments, evaluations, criticism and self-

criticism about what is good, worthy and legitimate practice in the solidarity economy.

Data Analysis and the Formalization of the Grammar

The first aim of this study was to identify the moral grammar of the solidarity economy and the moral-philosophical constructions it relies on. Our method to extract the grammar from the field started from an analysis of the critical and justificatory operations that people performed and that were represented in idealized form in our written material. We systematically coded interview transcripts, field notes and written material. Scanning the empirical material for systematic patterns in order to develop interpretive categories of justifications revealed that there were implicit evaluation mechanisms in place according to which social movement actors evaluated themselves. We focused on the values that were repeatedly stressed as a key element that had to be realized if an organization wanted to be recognized as a legitimate representation of the SEM. Through a systematic coding of justifications and interpretation of action we identified the key values that informed and guided discourses and material practices.

We then used the heuristic methods of pragmatist sociology that have been developed in Boltanski and Thévenot's major work "On Justification" (2006 [1991]). The innovation that it proposes is to draw on philosophical resources that articulate the moral and political commitments that actors express on the ground. In Boltanski and Thévenot's polity model, six philosophical texts serve as pure expressions of different visions of the common good that underpin six political and moral orders, or polities, that can be found in contemporary Western social life: civic (Jean-Jacques Rousseau), industrial (Saint-Simon), domestic (Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet), inspiration (Saint Augustine), fame (Thomas Hobbes) and market (Adam Smith). But rather than mechanically mobilizing the six orders of political and moral worth as described by Boltanski and Thevenot, pragmatist sociology invites the sociologist to

formalize the distinct orders, which reflect the discourse of the actors in the field of study.

In our case, texts of Proudhon and other cooperatives workers in the 19th century, as well as their 20th century successors, can be seen as philosophical articulations of the values that are found again in the solidarity economy. We selected a key text from each of the 1970s social movements that luminously articulates the ‘pure’ formulation of the moral and political constructions that we encountered in justifications about organizational principles. The process of formalizing a grammar resembles the way the linguist moves from the phonological level to the level of syntax. She thereby identifies the organizing elements and organizes them on the level of syntax with generative schemes to create intelligibility (Boltanski 2009b, p. 31). From the local level we then worked outwards to an understanding of the meta-level syntax on which the field-level grammar was based. Through repeated iterations between empirical material and theoretical articulations we identified the four moral values that continue to stimulate the solidarity economy movement today and which activists systematically allude to in their justifications. Linking the conceptual universe of political philosophy to the micro-processes of everyday life allows extracting the grammar of ordinary social interaction (see Figure 1).

----- Figure 1: The process of formalizing a grammar -----

The Libertarian Imaginary of the Solidarity Economy Movement: A Composite Grammar

Justifications systematically mobilized four values the pure forms of which we identified as creativity, conviviality, self-management and political activism (see Table 1). We treat these four values as grammatical elements according to which actors assign worth to particular activities, human capacities and justifications. Furthermore, the search for “pure” articulations

of grammatical elements draws attention to the fact that the combination of these four values did not occur by chance. SEM participants “see” the world through the lens of a moral grammar that is composed of the same four values as those that originate in Proudhon’s libertarian socialism in the 19th century.

--Table 1: The four polities that compose the grammar of the solidarity economy--

‘Creativity’. Vaneigem, who was one of the founders of the situationist movement, expressed the state of mind of ‘creativity’. The avant-garde movement created in the 1960s wanted to realize an alternative transformation of dominant culture and offer ways to participate in “The Revolution of Everyday Life” (Vaneigem 1967). Being born out of a purely artistic gesture against mass consumerism, situationists have inspired anti-corporate globalization activists like Naomi Klein (2005). For the situationist, each person is capable of changing his situation and creating his own subjectivity. Even those who are most vulnerable to social and economic domination are able to escape the state of misery: “The project of self-realization is born of the passion of creativity, in the moment when subjectivity wells up and wants to reign universally.” (Ibid., p. 248-249, own translation).

SEM actors appropriate situationist language when they talk about the entrepreneurs who are often unemployed and without resources: “Nobody, no matter how alienated, is without (or unaware of) an irreducible core of creativity.” (Ibid., p. 198.) Rather than remaining on the abstract level of social critique “in theory”, the SEM focuses on the present immediacy of poor, excluded people in order to help them escape poverty by realizing their own business projects ‘here and now’.

Jacques, the president of the “Cigales” in Paris, discusses how desire for creation becomes the engine for micro-credit projects:

“What is the carrier is really the desire, the personal utopia of the initiator. This utopian

dimension is still always present and provides the taste of the initiative, but an initiative that is not co-opted, which is not misappropriated by the capitalist machinery that leads people to engage in abusively alienated lives in the large enterprise. [...] Here, the sense of initiative that exists in everyone, or which exists in any case in many people, may attempt to free itself and focus on solving problems that they have identified as shared problems. In a given region, there is a range of emerging issues concerning the elderly, education, poverty, etc.. There is the desire to get engaged and to realize oneself—even through these projects.”

‘Conviviality’. The Austrian philosopher and cultural critic Illich expresses the need to radically reconstruct the industrial institutions towards a new ‘convivial’ model that reduces man’s dependence on specialized knowledge that is controlled by a technocratic elite. For Illich, technocratic corporatism destroys society “when it isolates people from each other and locks them into a man-made shell, when it undermines the texture of community by promoting extreme social polarization and splintering specialization” (Illich 1973, p. xxiii). A postindustrial production system must respect a personal and communitarian dimension and “articulate the triadic relationship between persons, tools, and a new collectivity. Such a society, in which modern technologies serve politically interrelated individuals rather than managers, I will call ‘convivial.’” (ibid., p. xxiv). Illich explains his use of the term conviviality as the German “Mitmenschlichkeit” (co-humanity, sympathy, friendship): “I choose the term “conviviality” to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment.” (ibid., p. 11).

‘Conviviality’ attaches particular importance to the human dimension of the solidarity economy and emphasizes that economic activity relies on relations between people, their human warmth, comradeship, social links and local responsibility for each other. Friendship is an integral value that creates trust and respect among activists in many grass-roots movements

(Polletta, 2002). When ‘conviviality’ is the dominant polity of justification in SEM organizations, a climate of comradeship, where people contribute to the collective well-being, becomes the *raison d’être* of the organization itself whereby workplace relations are held together by affective links as in kinship.

Régis, from LETS in Faubourg, France, remembers the day when he helped a member of his association in exchange for some “caillous”, which is the monetary unit that the LETS system put in circulation:

“I had the opportunity to paint an apartment together with the girl who asked me (it was in Montreuil). She did the painting with me. We did the painting together. We talked throughout the entire day. We taught different things to each other. She invited me to have lunch at noon. It went very well. And then when I left in the evening, I did not feel I had gained money, I had the impression of having gained more than money. It was an exchange. There was something that had happened during that day which was very pleasant. Even if I made some money by working.”

‘Self-management’. A lucid theoretical articulation of the third key value is expressed in Rosanvallon’s manifesto for “self-management”. One of the key theoreticians of the 70s self-management worker movement in France, Rosanvallon describes this democratic, decentralized management model that aims at workers’ re-appropriation of means of production through collective organization. It is both opposed to state collectivism, which ignores the managerial competencies of workers, and to the participatory management model, which employs workers ‘self-management’ without conceding property rights. It is the radical socialist version of Peter Drucker’s ‘management by objectives’ (1954), which reacted to the failures of centralized and hierarchic bureaucracies and wanted to provide a counterbalance to the technocratic rationality of big systems. Requiring that each worker is involved in the

collective management of the organization, self-management reverses specialization and the division of labor. The re-appropriation of means of production extends rights to co-determination to society: “Self-management postulates an enterprise directly controlled by workers, but largely open to society, whereby the fragmentation of property rights guarantees this openness by involving local collectivities in co-decision making on particular matters.” (Rosanvallon 1976, p. 126)

SEM organizations implement this model of collective organization, democratic member control and the elimination of organizational hierarchy: The organization is jointly-owned and democratically controlled so that each member (and some representatives of the local community) owns a share of the organization, participates in decision making and enjoys equal voting rights in the administrative bodies.

Luc, one of the three founders of “Opale” beside Bruno and Jeanne, an organization that promotes the creation of cultural projects. At the time of our enquiry, their principal activity was to support the opening of a series of music cafés all over France. These are small concert halls, which feature world music and alternative rock music. Luc explains the challenges of realizing in these endeavors organizational principles of self-management, following the example of “Opale” itself:

“It is true that we are attentive to the internal organization, the level of self-management, I would say [...]. You know, in music, you got some people who are very ‘rock and roll’. That may mean ‘only rights and never duties’. This is the great libertarian discourse. What is difficult to understand is that, necessarily, in the anarchist-libertarian-communitarian perspectives, you have a lot of duties. To do management is difficult. We are careful to make sure that people have autonomy in their jobs and are responsible [...] An association horrifies us where there is one manager who runs it. Finally we said that we, during the 13 years that Opal exists, we've never worked like that. During eight years there has been no director [...].

At Opal, we are all three the engine. Later we called [Bruno] the 'Director' since it's easier to communicate towards other institutions. But among us there is never a decision that is taken without anyone being consulted. We have a quasi-equality of wages [...] With the years, each has acquired very different skills, everyone likes to do really different things [...]. When you've three at the base in self-management, it runs 10 times better. And the young people we hired now, Gael and Clare, they are already hyper autonomous. They are 26 years old. They are super versatile [...] we train them but we never assist them.”

'Political activism'. This fourth polity reflects the political discourse about libertarian democracy that has been theorized by left philosophers such as Claude Lefort, the leader of the radical left and libertarian and anti-marxist-stalinist group “Socialisme or Barbary”. For Lefort, which has recognized that this position was typically libertarian^v, people organized in local associations are spontaneously political and naturally tend to organize themselves on a higher level in full autonomy. A political group such as Lefort's “Socialism or Barbary” must refrain from imposing any pre-defined political program, but enact this revolutionary avant-garde in order to identify the genuine political tenor of its local groups: “The purpose of politics is not to instruct, but to elucidate what is inscribed in the natural disposition of the life and conduct of workers” (1979 [1958], p. 104, own translation). An organizing catalyst, the political group seeks to “put them in touch with each other, make them communicate their individual experiences, help them to constitute step-by-step a veritable avant-garde network.” (ibid., p. 111-113, own translation). “To delve into workers' everyday lives so as to determine their actual political content rather than what was projected onto them” means that they have to ability to organize their own federation rather than the obligation to abandon their power to an enlightened revolutionary political party. This is a important difference between the Libertarian theory of Lefort and Marxist communism, which has described the proletariat in such a dark way that it becomes difficult to envisage how its members might develop any

consciousness of their material conditions and rise towards a leadership role. Capitalism has deprived him of his full physical, moral, political and human character” (Lefort, [1958], 1979, p. 73)

Contemporary solidarity economy organizations instantiate the anarchist spirit by engaging in managing public spaces in everyday life (Chaniel 1998, p. 36). And like the group “Socialism or Barbary”, which connected diverse worker groups, today, the World (or European) Social Forum provides the platform to connect these otherwise isolated groups of ordinary citizens, who have a political common sense without the need to be instructed by a political manifesto.

This view is also expressed by Arturo, president of the Fair Trade network “Artisans du Monde”, who explains that a libertarian political model underpins the organizational principles of SEM:

There are many things that are made by the citizens themselves who support a number of needs, especially in terms of proximity [...] The anti-globalization activists call me a libertarian anarchist [...]. Because they have a political approach that is rather Marxist or Trotskyist [...]. It's true that I'm not an orthodox Marxist. I think a good way to build up democracy in this world is to leave responsibility to the people rather than delegating it [...]. I do not care if people say I'm a libertarian [...]. You're not only a citizen when you vote in elections. We are also citizens when you get involved in organizing the development of your neighborhood or when you create economic initiatives that enable women in popular neighborhoods to take control of their lives [...], for example by that restaurants network that immigrant women organize [...]. It's not just the state or the company as a political organization, there are those models that are promising.”

The grammar of the SEM is a synthesis of these four polities of justification, which constitutes the way that actors follow when they have to argue about the identity of the

movement.

Case Analysis - POLE

Having first worked outwards from local justifications to the moral grammar, we will now, drawing on the case of POLE, re-focus on the ways in which the grammar is enacted as a particular organization of social movement practice.

One of the repeated SEM principles is to “create contestation through facts”. For activists, practical activity has more subversive powers than abstract critique, particularly if creativity can manifest itself in economic creation emerging from what others might regard as the social “nothingness” of impoverished suburbs. This form of inspired worth valuing the act of creation *ex nihilo* as an authentic artistic act is illustrated in our case of the “Pole d’Economie solidaire” (Hereafter POLE), a network that supports individuals *creating* proximity services.

Proximity services entrepreneurs become *future creators* and creation becomes *business*. The idea of *creation* stimulates the passion of the –often non-paid volunteering- project leaders at POLE, as well as their intimate desires and subjectivity. This is what we found in our interviews and participant observation at a local branch of POLEs network in Chalon sur Saône, a middle-sized community in French Burgundy, which involves 4 employees and about 15 volunteers. The non-profit association founded in 1997 seeks to offer the unemployed into a new form of labor through training and supporting the setting up of entrepreneurial micro-projects.

Even though it is the situationist value of human self-realization through ‘creativity’, as a response to local necessity, which is the dominant justification that can be found in activists’ account, POLE explicitly locates itself within SEM’s libertarian imaginary. The organization’s statutes explicitly refer to the promotion of projects that encourage social links

in the neighborhood (friendship), are cooperatively organized (self-management) and have a political dimension (political activism). POLE draws on some successful cases of setting up organic and fair trade restaurants, building a recycling centre or other kinds of proximity services. The interview with Manon, who joined POLE in Chalon, France, about a year ago as a full-time employee, illustrates the ambition of POLE. This is to use entrepreneurship to help people who are “in the mess” to start a new, more fulfilling work life where they can pursue their passions and realize their individual potentials:

“The people who come to POLE, they are really in the mess. [...] There are many people who are self-employed, also people who are tired of having a boss. Who had a boss on their backs for years. A boss that fired them like dirt. These are people who don’t want to go back to these logics of metro-boulot-dodo [commuting-working-sleeping], but who want to flower up [...]: There are many people who come out of a factory at 20, and who have a passion. And they want to work for their passion, and why not earn money with their passion? [...]. We really motivate them to set up their projects that they feel deeply about, that allow them to flower up. That doesn’t simply mean re-socialization. We are more going into individual self-realization, in the sense of creating a network between project initiators, between creators, between businesses that exist here in the Chalon region.”

The dominant theme in Manon’s account reflects the urgency of immediate action to help people in difficulty. Their concrete situation ‘here and now’ is the dominant concern of Manon’s polity of justification. Here, social entrepreneurship is not only a way to avoid dependence on social welfare benefits but POLE also wants to enable people to escape the monotony and dullness of their ordinary working life. Manon speaks of “earning money through passion”, “flowering up” and “self-realization through creation”.

Offering free services to unemployed people, POLE appears as a valid realization of the libertarian imaginary. While we observed daily activities, members at POLE emphasized at

various instances their aim to also become politically active, for example in the anti-globalization movement. They further insisted on the democratic decision-making of the organization and the importance of a convivial spirit.

But in the course of the interview, Manon reflects on the incongruity between the reality of her professional life, where she recognizes a mismatch between SEM's libertarian imaginary and the actual practices of POLE:

“To really create an alternative economy, to support exclusively the cooperatives of this sort that would be nice...but one becomes aware that there are enormous political pressures so that you cannot concentrate on solidarity economy, but you are really forced to support the creation of businesses, and whatever type of business it may be [...] We also have long since debated here about it and my brother [who works at a anarchist bookshop] he said ‘But that’s crazy, you’re creating future bosses, but that has nothing to do with the logic of solidarity economy! That's micro-capitalism!’ [...] The logic of funding, that is also something that defines, that determines our activity. We are in fact extremely dependent when it comes to funding. An example: we want to set up a solidarity economy enterprise. We won't get funding if that project is about solidarity economy. We won't get funding if it is called ‘support of a solidarity economy project.’ But if it was aimed at the creation of a business...You see what I'm trying to get at?”

After the interview, Manon lead us to her favorite lunch place, a near-by organic and fair trade restaurant close to the far-left activist area of the town. She showed the kind of ‘true’ social enterprise that she would like to support in her professional life, but which funding bodies would consider unsustainable on the market. Her work, however, is characterized by the constant regret of not being truly able to pursue her political ideals and reconcile these with the economic creativity of unemployed people.

The dilemma Manon finds herself in that funding bodies, such as the European Social Fund, base their decisions for resource allocation primarily on economic arguments. Public funding

bodies, who are primarily concerned with bringing down the rate of unemployment, demand that projects get people out of social welfare aid. But the risk of failure of a project often correlates with its degree of originality. The project initiators at POLE often have to reject the most original projects. As a consequence, the projects that POLE supports tend to be “ordinary businesses”. To a certain extent, Manon leans on the logic of ‘here and now’ to justify that circumstances, as they are, leave no other immediate choice but to activate all possible and thinkable approaches to assist setting up business activities for the most powerless.

Pole also risks losing recognition from other SEM activists. Arturo, a project manager at the French federation of the Fair Trade shops “Artisans du Monde” equally reasons that financial dependence subjects several POLEs to the political objectives of funding bodies:

“The problem with the “Pôles d'économie solidaire” is that...[...] they are invested in business creation, but in the creation of classical business, which does not properly respect the alternative spirit of the SEM. In my opinion, that's not good. That's a short-term approach to reduce unemployment. And it is totally part of a school of thought in the liberal tradition, in the economic sense of the term. That means it's better that people are small entrepreneurs than employees. Thus they must become classical entrepreneurs [...]. I think that concerning the SEM, as an alternative economy, that is not enough [...] All these micro-structures we're talking of, in my opinion, they're not social enterprises...That's solidarity because you help, you help to find a bank loan to people who otherwise wouldn't get one. But that's all. The Pôles who choose to develop social enterprises based on social solidarity in niche activities, and who accept to have less state money, that I find good!”

Both Manon's and Arturo's accounts indicate that the vocabulary of ‘creativity’ alone is not sufficient to speak the language of the SEM. In contrast, it risks reducing a libertarian solidarity economy to a neo-liberal incarnation of micro-capitalism.

Discussion: Extrapolation as Grammatical Mistake

The libertarian imaginary of the SEM is not monolithic. It is a complex construction composed of the synthesis of four polities of justification. These polities are organized by the grammar, a heuristic device, which can be understood as the syntax of the moral imaginary. Each polity is based on a particular value (or common good as the pragmatist would say). They form a synthesis ‘as if’ they were the rules of a common grammar. This allows actors to submit all initiatives to the same rules of equivalency in order to evaluate their worthiness and authenticity. When practices correspond to the defined relation with the objects in the world, then one is in a situation that Boltanski calls a ‘state of peace’ (1990). It describes the situation in which justification is grammatically correct.

Individual actors mobilize arguments around values, even if one value is emphasized over the others. Such a dominant value can be regarded as a specific coloration. But the extent to which the grammar is respected in its *unity* influences the attribution of social worth: In the ideal state, a grammar is actively mobilized through justifications that express corresponding organizational principles. In other words, traveling between polities is the competency to ‘speak in many tongues’ and justify oneself by more than one standard of measure (Stark 1996). When both practices and their motivations correspond to the moral imaginary organizations are collectively celebrated as ideal-type material representations of the SEM. They become what Max Scheler terms an ‘example to follow’ (1987 [1921]), a moral champion that is praised by actors in the field.

Or, in a critical situation, a grammar can give rise to self-criticism when deviations from the grammar are recognized. The values that underpin the imaginary function like cardinal points of a transcendent moral structure, which, when not respected as in the case of POLE, provoke critical reactions. A grammatical mistake (Lemieux 2009) elicits self-reflection and self-

criticism, as it becomes necessary to articulate reasons for grammatical deviance. This moment of discursive reflexivity allows studying the critical and justificatory operations that people perform in everyday situations. They accuse themselves or see themselves accused by others of what we call the ‘extrapolation’ of their particular coloration. Extrapolation occurs when a single polity (‘creativity’ in our case) becomes the overriding justification of action in the world. Actors who are leaning out too far towards a dominant polity and failing to shift back to the neglected polities stretch the boundaries of the grammar.

The notion of extrapolation throws new light on how political struggles over conflicting frames and meanings can be interpreted with important implications for social movements practitioners. It suggests that conflicts are an effect of conflicts *between* the elements that are constitutive of a shared moral grammar (See Figure 2).

---- Insert Figure 2: The SEM grammar with its four states of mind and its extrapolations ----

How did the capitalist rationality co-opted the alternative spirit of the solidarity economy? The situationist polity or ‘creativity’ is already part of the grammar itself. But when its values become employed in the service of dominant institutions it loses its emancipatory potential. As a result, initiatives depart from the libertarian universe of the solidarity economy. Instead of creating proximity services or fair trade activities, they resemble ordinary businesses in a competitive world (extrapolation of ‘creativity’). As a consequence, members risk losing their legitimacy as social movement activists. The propensity to assign less social worth to practices that violate the moral grammar confirms that the SEM imaginary is not only an abstraction that puts a theoretical frame around disparate realities.

The artistic gesture of creativity had great repercussion in the formalization of the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007 [1999], p. 97-101). However, it is not only the situationist polity that is prone to extrapolation. Had we chosen a different organization from

our empirical sample, we would have seen that other solidarity economy actors equally extrapolate their dominant polities: left-wing extremists in anti-globalization forums, charity workers in a world of Christian benevolence or bureaucrats in large cooperatives who forget to be self-managed. Polletta's (2002) analysis of American grass-root activist movements identifies similar tensions of conflicting value commitments that are internal to the organizational model of these movements. For example, new leftist and women's liberation movements of the sixties and seventies modelled participatory democratic organization on friendship. While friendship created relations of cohesion and trust, it also fostered exclusivity and generated difficulties to integrate newcomers and to formalise decision making, which impeded on participatory democratic functioning. So it is rather this commitment to partly conflicting value commitments than organisational inefficiency that explains why these movements based on participatory democracy often disintegrated. Extrapolation of particular values here points to the limits of the solidarity economy as a political project: In the quest for concrete, immediate impact the solidarity economy tends to privilege sacrificing moral heroism for seizing opportunities 'here and now'. As a consequence, actors too easily fall into the dominant polity that satisfies the requirements of their institutional environment.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to demonstrate the value of pragmatist sociology as a heuristic device to conduct a grammatical analysis of the values motivating social action. This offers a refreshing sociological perspective on phenomena such as social movements, where action is motivated on ethical and political grounds and directed against the dominant rationality of existing power structures.

Our contribution, which consisted in pursuing a grammatical analysis of the SEM, involves

three dimensions. First, the focus brought in by French pragmatist sociology is the notion of grammar, which helps to understand how disparate actors in social movements are held together through the recognition of a shared body of normative principles. This offers a useful framework to think about moral and political constructions of the common good as organizing schemes that guide social action, thought and justification. A grammar guides how actors make judgments and assign social worth (status, recognition, legitimacy) not only to others but also to themselves.

Second, the notion of the grammar also allowed us to demonstrate the link between micro-action and macro-frames and its historical anchorage. By encouraging to look for the normative sources that are expressed in justifications beyond the local situation itself, the framework reveals here one of its main qualities: The heuristic power consists in conceptualizing empirical justifications in light of moral and political constructions on a theoretical level. This allows constituting interdependencies and historical contingencies across time and space.

We hence showed how the SEM has been constructed from the historical legacy of a marginalized or partly forgotten intellectual and practical tradition: libertarian socialism. The libertarian cultural and economic criticism stemming from the 19th century cooperative movement as well as the struggles of radical social counter-movements in the 1970s continues to inspire SEM projects. We have identified their grammar by interpreting micro-level actions and justifications found in our empirical material through the “magnifying glass” of texts of its protagonists. They can hence be understood as philosophical articulations of the grammatical elements that we encountered in the field.

Third, our findings are relevant to understand why social movements remain marginal on a political scale and tend to lose their critical potential in internal disputes, rather than channel

it towards real social transformation. We emphasized that the grammar is not monolithic. It is a composite construct that consists of recombined of elements of political values that form a synthesis of complementary, yet potentially rivalry orders of worth, or ‘polities’, as the pragmatist would say.

It is important to point out that in our example of the SEM, we discerned the grammar of an already socially progressive movement, which is often celebrated as a hero in the fight against the capitalist hegemony (Davidson 2008, Laville 2008). We have used French pragmatist sociology to advance a grammatical analysis, but we have not advanced its meta-critical dimension. This remains an important question to formulate a sociology of critique (Boltanski 2009a). Nevertheless, understanding the normative exigencies that bear upon social interaction are an important starting point to address questions of repression and authority. It helps to understand the normative requirements under different grammatical settings for gaining social worth, where they stem from and how they change over time. We further suggest that a grammatical analysis and the notion of extrapolation as grammatical mistake are not limited to social movements but could be transferred to other social situations. This opens up space for novel avenues of investigation. There is considerable potential to investigate how recombination of moral and political ideas takes place, what elements persist over time, what are the different forms of transmission, and how compromise between states of mind occur. Future research should take grammatical dynamics into account and seek to understand how historical ideational “specters” (Derrida 1993) continue to haunt present day grammatical constructs and where their normative power stems from. It is equally of interest to understand the processes when and how such extrapolations of social norms become acceptable, and how can this lead to the formation of new social imaginaries.

Endnotes

ⁱ In this article, we will not analyze the relation of French pragmatist sociology with American pragmatist philosophy of Dewey and James (see Breviglieri, Lafaye and Trom 2009).

ⁱⁱ AMAP (Associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne), see <http://www.reseau-amap.org/>

ⁱⁱⁱ RERS (Reseaux d'échanges reciproques des savoirs)

^{iv} The group "Socialism or Barbary" was eventually brought to fall in 1967 due to a dispute between Lefort's libertarian stance and Castoriadis' more classical socialist party position. The text quoted illustrates Castoriadis subsequent rapprochement to Lefort's position.

^vLibertarian is here meant in a collective sense (Lefort, 1979, p. 14-15), rather than in the individualist definition of Nozick's libertarianism (1974)

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APPENDIX A

Table A1

Interviews conducted in the solidarity economy movement

Category	Organization	Inter-views
Fair Trade North-South and North-North	- Max Havelaar	1
	- Artisans du Monde	3
	- Epices	1
	- Biocoop	2
	- Associations Pour le Maintien de l'Agriculture Paysanne (AMAP)	5
Non-financial exchanges	- Services d'Echange Locaux (SEL)	4
	- Réseaux d'Echanges Réciproques des Savoirs	3
	- Collectif MB2	3
	- Mediasol	2
Consulting services for proximity services	- Réseau de Citoyenneté sociale (RCS)	3
	- Association pour le Développement des Services de Proximité (ADSP)	3
	- Association pour le développement de l'économie locale (ADEL)	4
	- Opale (Culture et Proximité)	2
	- Centre des Jeune Dirigeants de l'Economie Sociale (CJDES)	4
	- Pôles d'économie solidaire	2
Micro-finance North-North and	- Associations Solidarité-Emploi	5
	- Fédération des Cigales	5
	- Autonomie et solidarité	3

North-South	- Caisse solidaire du Nord-Pas-de-Calais	1
	- Peuples solidaires	1
Meta-organizations*	- Mouvement pour l'Economie solidaire (MES, National)	6
	- Assemblée Permanente de l'Economie Solidaire solidaire (APES, Lille)	3
	- Association Régionale pour le Développement de l'Economie Solidaire (ARDES, Caen)	3
	- Agence Provençale de l'Economie Alternative et Solidaire (APEAS, Marseille)	3
	- Agence pour le DEveloppement et la Promotion de l'Economie Solidaire (ADEPES, Toulouse)	3
Total	25	75

* Most of the leaders in meta-organizations interviewed were also engaged in associations from the four other categories.

FIGURES

Figure 1

The process of formalizing a moral grammar of action and justification

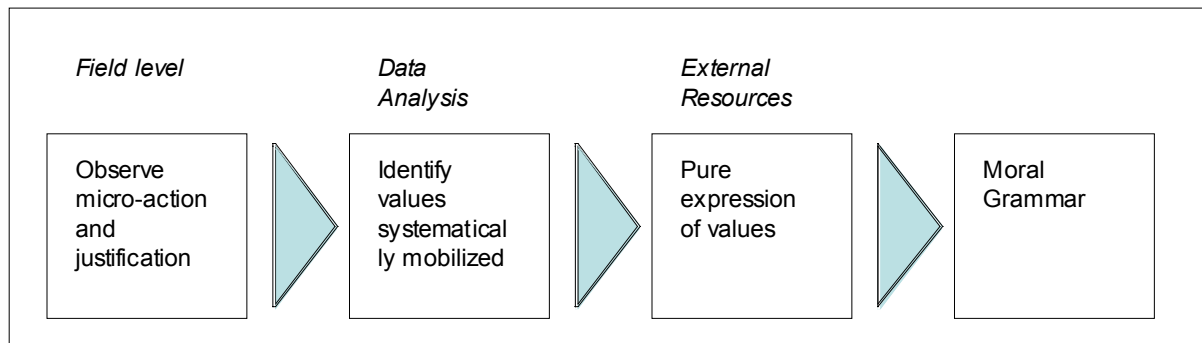
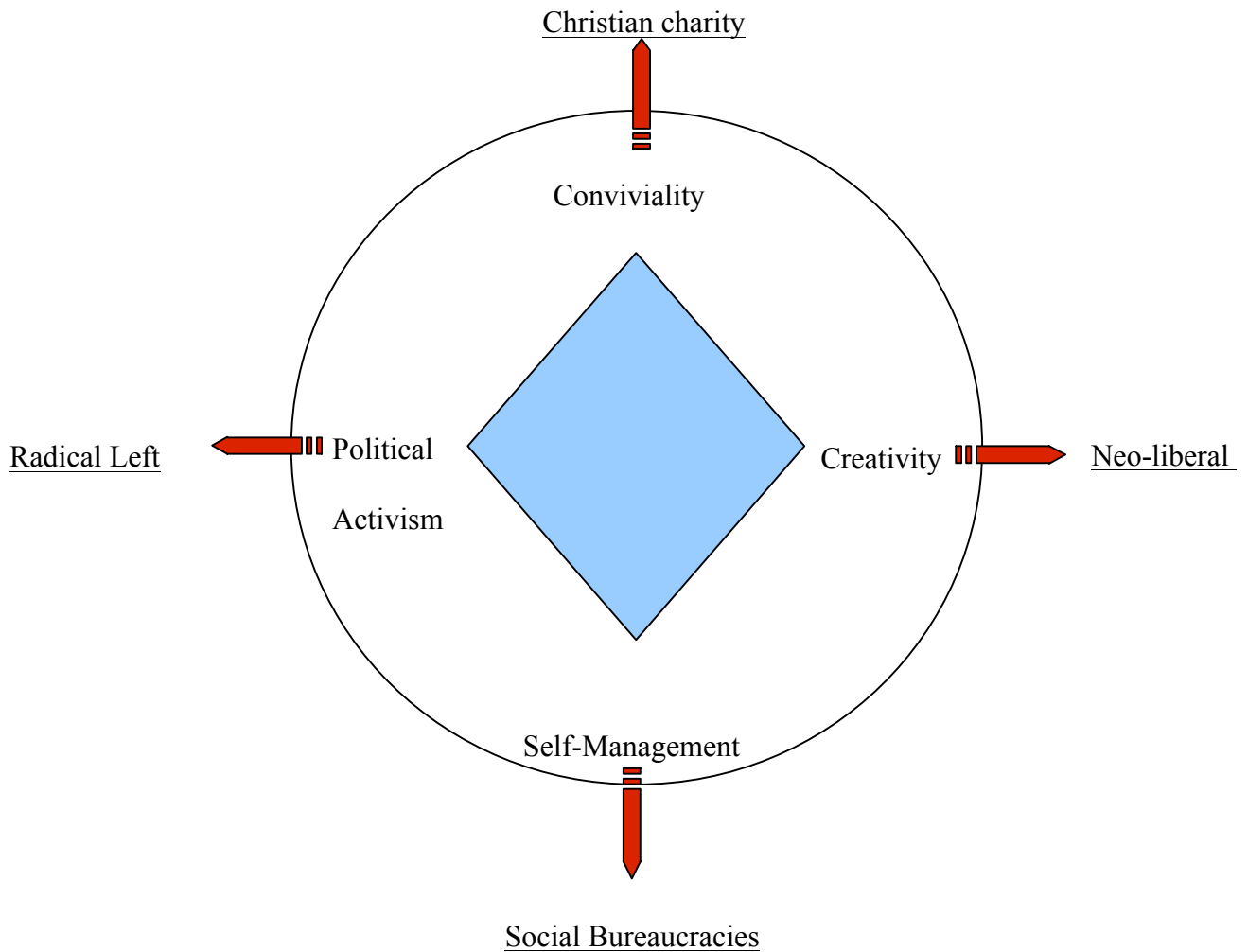




Figure 2

The grammar of the solidarity economy with its four polities and their extrapolations



 Imaginary coordination between states of mind (grammatically correct space)

 Grammatical Mistake as extrapolation (outside of the Solidarity economy imaginary)

TABLES

Table 1

The four polities that compose the grammar of the solidarity economy movement

Polities	Creativity	Conviviality	Self-management	Political activism
Theoretical Articulations	Raoul Vaneigem “The Revolution of Everyday Life” (1972)	Ivan Illich “Tools for Conviviality” (1973)	Pierre Rosanvallon “L’âge de autogestion” (1976) (The Age of Self-management)	Claude Lefort “Organisation et parti” (1979 [1958])
Grammatical elements	Passion, Ideas, Imagination, Initiative	Social ties, Comradeship, Proximity	Responsibility, autonomy, Equality	Equal voice, collective decision making, local public spaces, citizenship
Human capacities	Capacity to self-realization, subjectivity expression	Benevolence, humor, sympathy	Technical and Administrative Skills, Knowledge, “Polyvalence”	Being engaged and having a political opinion
Organizational principles	Innovate and create things, Business activity	Helping and spending time with people close to oneself, communitarian and neighborhood, activity	Collective organization without hierarchy, no division of labour	Political manifestations, activities with a political message