



## MARXISM AND THE END OF THE WORK SOCIETY

*Frédéric Vandenberghe*

**ABSTRACT** Reading the *Communist Manifesto* against the contemporary background of massive unemployment, the author argues that Marx's theory of work is no longer adequate to tackle the problem of 'workers without work' and suggests that it has to be reformulated in such a way that its normative intuitions and its critical impulses can be maintained. In the first part, he presents a philosophical critique of Marxism that is inspired by Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt. In the second part, he presents a sociological critique of Marxism and argues that the theory of the alienation of work implies a justification of work and the work society. Finally, in the last part, the author presents an ideological critique of Marxism that is inspired by Marcel Mauss' sociology of the gift. Criticising the contractualist assumptions of welfare solutions, he proposes a package solution for a radical decommodification of the labour market by means of a disjunction of income and work.

**KEYWORDS** alienation • Arendt • basic income • gift • Habermas • lets • Marxism • Mauss • unemployment • work

The *Communist Manifesto* is a historical monument. Considered however not as a monument but as a historical document, that is as a more or less coherent text of the past whose meaning we want to hermeneutically reconstruct in the present (Foucault, 1969: 14–15 and 182), we can analyse it in two ways. We can either adopt the historicist posture of the historian of ideas and retroject ourselves in the past to understand it in its own terms or, alternatively, we can adopt the presentist posture of the social theorist and project the document in the present to understand it in our terms (Skinner, 1969; for a critique, see Seidman, 1983).

In the first case, we try to understand what the text really means by re-embedding the author and the text in the historical context. Suspending all

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judgements as to the present meaning or utility of the text, we forget our present and retroject ourselves in the past in order to reconstruct the meaning of the textual fragments by reconnecting them to their concrete conditions of production. Considered as an intertext, the meaning of the text can thus only be understood, according to the historicist, if it is seen as a thread in the web of texts and relinked to the practical circumstances that existed at the time of its production. Thus, to properly understand the *Communist Manifesto*, we have to know that it was actually commissioned in 1847 by a semi-clandestine radical London-based association of German intellectuals, the 'League of the Just', which had just renamed itself as the 'Communist League', and that by writing it, alone or together with Engels, Marx was really entering into a debate with Moses Hess, Wilhelm Weitling, Charles Fourier, Joseph-Pierre Proudhon, Auguste Blanqui, Etienne Cabet, Robert Owen, and Ludwig Feuerbach, who all had their adherents and advocates within the League (Beamish, 1998).

If the historicist tries to interpret the text of the past in its own terms, the presentist historian of ideas tries to understand it in terms of the present. Reading the text anachronically – or even 'wiggishly' (Butterfield) – he systematically interprets the answers of the past as if they offered answers to the theoretical and practical questions of the present. Instead of retrojecting ourselves in the past, we thus project the text of the past into the present, searching for answers to questions which the author of the text may never have conceived for the simple reason that they were inconceivable at the time. Thus, for instance, we may read the *Communist Manifesto* to reformulate the aims of socialism in terms of Habermas's theory of communicative action or to ideologically counter the neo-liberal interpretation of the contemporary processes of globalisation.

In this paper I will be concerned with the contemporary problem of massive unemployment in post-industrial societies. My reading of Marx's texts will thus necessarily be a presentist one. If we may believe the latest estimates of the World Labour Organisation, the ranks of the reserve army of the un- and underemployed have now swollen to 800,000,000. Against the background of the contemporary misery of this 'non class of non workers' (Gorz, 1980: 101–13), I analyse Marx's philosophical, sociological and ideological conceptions of work and question their contemporary relevance to tackle the issue of unemployment. My reading of Marx will also be a critical one. Indeed, inspired by Horkheimer's political reformulation of Hegel's reflexive critique of ideas (Horkheimer, 1972), according to which a theory is critical insofar as it is self-conscious about its historicity, takes seriously its genetic context of theoretical determination and ties itself reflexively to its prospective context of application, I will argue that Marx's theory is tainted by the fact that it emerged in the context of early industrialism, that as a result of historic change, it is no longer adequate to tackle the post-industrial problem of 'workers without work' and that it has to be reformulated in such a way

that its normative intuitions and its critical impulses can be maintained. In the first part, I will present a philosophical critique of Marxism that is inspired by Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt. Rejecting or amending the productivist, holist, statist and classist presuppositions of Marxism, I stress the political forces that emanate from the life-world and propose to redefine the socialist project in terms of a democratic domestication of the subsystems of the market and the administration of the state. In the second part, I will present a sociological critique of Marxism. I argue that the theory of the alienation of work implies a justification of work and the work society which is no longer adequate for the present. Unable to grasp the non-productive character of post-industrial work, the Marxist gospel of work is of little use when work is no longer available. Even more, I argue that it blocks the transition to a post-work society. Finally, in the last part, I present an ideological critique of Marxism that is inspired by Marcel Mauss' sociology of the gift. Criticising the contractualist assumptions of workfare solutions, I propose a package solution for a radical decommodification of the labour market by means of a disjunction of income and work. Given the current neo-liberal backlash, the proposals to shorten the working week, to introduce a basic income, to develop a social economy and to support cooperation circles may indeed appear as so many 'pocket editions of the New Jerusalem' (Marx, 1972, IV: 491). And yet, if I am overshooting the mark, it is because I know that what is objectively possible can only be achieved if the sights are set higher than what is objectively possible.

### **A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF MARXISM**

Let me start my critique of Marxism with a question. Can the collapse of a political-economic system decide over the truth of a socio-philosophical theory? Does the collapse of the iron cage of 'really existing socialism' mean that the hard core of Marxism has been refuted once and for all? Insofar as Marx himself indicated in the *Theses on Feuerbach* that the truth of a theory would ultimately be judged by the success of the practices to which it is tied, one might be inclined to answer the question by a straightforward and unambiguous 'yes'. However, from a critical humanist perspective, which remains faithful to the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment, this answer has to be rejected most categorically. First of all, given that Marxism is above all concerned with the critique of capitalism, it does not make much sense, as Jameson has rightly noted, to talk about the bankruptcy of Marxism, when Marxism is very precisely the science and the study of just that capitalism whose global triumph is affirmed in talk of Marxism's demise (Jameson, 1991: 255). Moreover, the inhuman practices of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe can certainly not be considered as an authentic realisation of Marxist humanism. The fact that dissidents, such as the Praxis-group in former Yugoslavia or the Budapest school in Hungary, were drawing on Marx's

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(early) texts to criticise the socialist regimes which were misusing Marx and Engels' theory to legitimate the authoritarian and undemocratic practices of a bureaucratic party-system proves not only that one can always argue with Marx against Marx but also, and more importantly, that Lenin's move to Soviet Marxism can hardly be justified by recourse to Marxist theory.

Yet the fact that one cannot simply argue that this humanist theory and those inhuman practices have nothing to do with each other forces us to critically re-evaluate Marxism. The aim of such a critical re-evaluation of Marx is to safeguard its normative and critical potential – even if that means that most of its themes and theses have to be discarded. Here as elsewhere, it is the reflexive critique of a theory that allows one to evaluate it by gauging the extent to which it adequately conceptualises the social context and the conditions of its possible transformation. If the theory is so tied to its historical context of emergence that it is no longer in tune with the present, it makes sense to critically inspect its premisses and to try to reformulate the theory in order to adapt it to a transformed context of application. When the world has changed, the point is to interpret the theory in a different way.

Looking back at the context of emergence of Marxism, we can discern at least four main themes which reveal the extent to which Marx, and most of his followers, remained tied to the social conditions of early industrialism (see also Habermas, 1990: 189–90).

(1) Productivism: Marx's analysis of capitalism epitomises the productivist understanding of labour of early industrial capitalism. It does not anticipate or transcend the limits of the 'work society' but generalises specific characteristics of nineteenth century society, and projects them into the past and into the future. As a result, it does not conceive of the possibility of a society where work would no longer be *the* fundamental social fact shaping the structure of society, programming its conflicts, socialising its members, and accomplishing the social synthesis by binding them together. Marx was certainly right when he wrote that all societies are compelled to enter into a 'metabolism between man and nature' through 'labour' (Marx, 1972, XXIII: 57) and to organise this metabolism so that the satisfaction of the primary needs of its members can be satisfied, but this does not mean that all societies in the past or in the future were or will be organised around the category of work. The concept of 'work' (*Arbeit, travail*), understood in the contemporary sense of the word as the 'free' or contractual exchange of a certain amount of time of productive activity against a wage, is not a historical invariant, not an anthropological a priori but an invention of modernity, more particularly of industrial capitalism. Indeed, as long as the economy was 'embedded' in the social, the production for an anonymous market remained marginal and the majority of needs were mainly satisfied through domestic production and the economy of the village (Polanyi, 1944). The category of work as such, of 'work *sans phrase*' (Marx, 1953: 25) as Marx called it, simply did not exist. People were certainly cultivating the land, weaving cloth or

making furniture; they were producing useful goods for the local market but they did not work, and certainly not for a wage. The activities of the farmer, the weaver or the carpenter were incommensurable. Given that they were not homogenised under a common measure, they were not substitutable and could not be exchanged against a wage. It is only when a free labour market came into existence and labour power was treated as a 'fictitious commodity' (Polanyi) that work became central to the whole of society as the nexus that keeps society together. Marx identified the emergence of the labour market with the emergence of capitalism. And although he was highly critical of the commodification of labour power, as can be gathered from his disparaging attacks of the bourgeois economists who justify capitalist exploitation by treating labour on a par with any other commodity, he nevertheless accepted and took over their views concerning the centrality of work and its positive meaning (Méda, 1995: 92–129).

The glorification of work, which characterises Marxism, can easily be seen in Marx's productivism and in the importance he attaches to the means of production (see Beilharz, 1992: 7–14). For Marx, the means of production are inseparable from the emancipation of the proletariat. It is because the workers are concentrated in factories and are treated as a 'mere appendage to the machine' (Marx, 1972, IV: 468) that they become conscious of the internal link which exists between their labour and the accumulation of capital, and eventually decide to break it. Expropriating the capitalists by reappropriating the means of production, the working class becomes the dominant class and redistributes the collective wealth, which results from the work of all, to each according to their contribution to the collective creation of wealth. Having liberated the workers from the oppression of capital, the abolition of private property also liberates the means of production from the 'fetters' of the mode of production. The forces of production can then be fully developed and the collective work process organised according to the dictates of technical rationality. This productivist scenario of the 'administration of things' (Saint Simon) is not only blind to the ecological consequences of industrialism, it also neglects the social and political forces beyond and underneath the sphere of production that keep society together.

Drawing on Hannah Arendt's classic interpretation of Aristotle (Arendt, 1961), we could charge Marx with reducing the political category of 'action' to the economic one of 'production', with the result that the hierarchy between the economic and the political sphere is inverted and that the economic sphere is allowed to reign supreme. Marx's conviction that the social order is grounded in production and that all social problems can be solved within the sphere of production led him to deny the necessity of a specifically political sphere which could not only regulate and limit the impact of the economic sphere of production, but would also constitute an autonomous civil sphere, which has nothing to do with production and in which citizens could gather to publicly discuss the politics of the 'good life'.

(2) Holism: Marx's analysis remains tied to a holistic and vaguely idealistic conception of society which is of Hegelian origin. Reconceptualising history as the history of class struggles, Marx conceives of history as a triphasic process: in the beginning, in the era of the Father so to speak, primitive communism reigns. Society is not divided by any opposition and forms, as Hegel says, a 'beautiful totality'. With the separation of manual and intellectual labour, this 'beautiful totality' is split asunder, and together with history, the class struggle ensues. The hidden (onto-theo-)teleological assumption here is that the class struggle will eventually lead to the advent of the classless society, and thus to the restoration of the 'ethical totality' of the past. From this Hegelian perspective, the autonomisation of the economic system appears as a fetishistic illusion whose spell can be broken once the proletariat realises that the economic system is nothing else but the alienated product of its own labour. Once this spell is broken, the autonomy of the economic system can be abolished and re-embedded into its communal context, as a result of which the process of production can be rationally organised in such a way that the labour of each is consciously coordinated by means of a plan for the production and the distribution of goods. The problem with this Hegelian reading of the economic system as an alienated system of production is that it does not recognise the systemic hypercomplexity of a functionally differentiated society (Luhmann, 1997, II: ch. 4). Pleading for a dedifferentiation of the economic subsystem, it simply fails to acknowledge that the market economy cannot be steered by means of the regulative planning of the administration of the state without jeopardising the freedom of the individual. That the abolition of the autonomy of the economy goes together with the autonomisation of the state, and that this autonomisation of the state does not abolish alienation but introduces a specific form of political alienation, which is independent of the economic system and can only be solved democratically in the public sphere of civil society – this is one of the main lessons which the century of totalitarianism has taught us.

(3) Democracy: Is it exaggerated to say that the issue of democracy constitutes the blind spot of the whole Marxist tradition, from Marx to Mao and Marcuse? I don't think so. At best, Marx had a purely instrumental and strategic conception of democracy. In his most reformist moods, he conceived universal (male) suffrage as a means that would allow the majority of the workers to seize power and granted that the workers could achieve their aims by way of the ballot. At worst, Marx had only contempt for the empty formalism of liberal democracy and considered it as a typically bourgeois and thus transitory form which communism would 'realise' in the ominous form of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. With the advantage of hindsight, we can now clearly see that he underestimated the importance which political liberalism attached to the notion of freedom in general and parliamentary democracy in particular. Rather than confronting the dialectical tension which exists between freedom and equality, he gave all priority

to equality in the belief that an egalitarian society would also necessarily be a free one. This belief is however largely mistaken. In so far as the 'equalisation of conditions' (Tocqueville) presupposes an active intervention of the state which can become despotic, it is necessary that the power of the state is democratically checked and limited. This can only be done if the associations of civil society are not controlled by the state but if they are allowed to control the legislative process through their representatives. The effectiveness of democratic associations presupposes that freedom is institutionalised in a representative parliamentary democracy and that the administration of the state can only legitimately intervene in civil society if the formal conditions necessary to democratically justify this intervention are satisfied. Marx had nothing to say, however, about the institutionalisation of freedom and parliamentary democracy. This is linked not only to his statism but also to his productivism. It is only if the productivist inversion of work and action is re-inverted and communicative action is not reduced to instrumental action that democratic political action as such becomes conceivable. It is only then that we can think of an autonomous public sphere in which the citizens gather to discuss the ends of society and the means to control and domesticate the economic and the political subsystems.

(4) The proletariat: The productivist, the holist and the statist presuppositions come together in Marx's substantialist conception of the proletariat as the social megasubject that carries and drives forward the processes of social production and reproduction. Once more we are confronted here with a legacy of absolute idealism: given that the existing world is no longer created by spiritual activities but by working subjects, the proletariat simply replaces the spirit as the 'identical subject-object of history' (Lukács). Although the materialist concept of labour replaces the idealist concept of spirit, the underlying idea remains clearly Hegelian. The history of mankind is the history of the objectification of man through labour. As labour becomes alienated, history is no longer made with will and consciousness, but man is dominated by the products of his own labour. Once the alienation of labour is recognised for what it is and the workers recognise that they are dominated by their own products, they become conscious of their historical role and reappropriate the products of their own labour. In so far as the abolition of private property is synonymous with the abolition of the autonomy of the economic system, the whole metaphysical narrative of the objectivation, alienation and resubjectivation of labour only thinly disguises its incapacity to take the hypercomplexity of modern societies into account. Modern societies are 'outdifferentiated'. They do not have a centre which controls the totality or a first instance which overdetermines the other instances. Consequently, the attempt to seize and control the power of the state in order to abolish the autonomy of the economy misfires. Against Marx, it should be stressed that the point is not to abolish the market or the state, but to defend civil society against encroachment from colonisation by the subsystems of

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the state and the economy. In this sense, a radical politics has to be 'self-limiting' (Cohen and Arato, 1995). The democratic struggle aims to reorganise the relationship between the economy, the state and civil society in such a way that the former become more responsive to the demands of the latter.

Reformulated in positive terms, the anti-productivist and anti-metaphysical critique of Marx which I have presented aims to defend the primacy of the political, which should not be confounded with the primacy of politics (Lefort, 1986). Politics is a systemic term. It refers to the institutionalised struggle for power by professional politicians. The political, on the other hand, is a foundational term. Inspired by Hannah Arendt (1958) and Jürgen Habermas (1992), we can define it as the totality of communicative activities which take place in the private sphere and prolong themselves in the public sphere when the citizens come together to discuss the ends of society and the most appropriate means to realise them. The introduction of the political as the foundation of the social reverses the productivist conception of society. Life is no longer conceived as production, but as action, or more precisely, as a combination of production and communicative action. Production still plays a role, of course, but given that its role is now defined and circumscribed by action, it is made subservient to action.

This reversal of the hierarchy between production and action throws new light on the problem of order. Communication, not work, is the glue of the social bond. Indeed, from a communicative perspective, society is kept together not so much because the productive activities of each are coordinated *ex post* by the laws of an anonymous market or integrated *ex ante* in a plan which is presented as the 'general will' of the associated producers but because each of the citizens has the capacity to discuss and to deliberate on a common plan and to coordinate their actions in such a way that the self-determination of each is combined with the solidarity of all. When Marx's association of producers is thus transformed into a democratic association of citizens, the 'general will' of a hypostasised subject is no longer superimposed on the elements. The general will emerges from below; it is the result of the deliberation of all (Manin, 1985). The advantage of this communicative conception of a deliberative democracy is that the totalitarian implications of Marxism are a priori excluded. The socialist project of the collective self-determination of society is not abandoned but reflexively pursued in such a way that it does not conflict with the negative right to freedom of the individuals. Though formal, this freedom is not empty. In so far as it guarantees that the ends of society are not given but result from the liberation of all, it presupposes and projects a democratic society in which political decisions would be legitimate, because they would counterfactually find the assent of all the citizens involved.

With the communicative dissolution of the Subject into a plurality of deliberating subjects, the metaphysics of the collective worker as the identical subject-object of history is abrogated as well. Given the complexity of

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modern societies, the project to abolish the autonomy of the economic system in such a way that society becomes coextensive with the life-world has to be regarded as an anachronistic and regressive dream with familial or communal overtones. Modern society is simply not an ashram on a large scale. In so far as complex societies need to assure the mass production of goods, they can only reproduce themselves on the condition that the autopoietic logic of a disembedded economy is left intact. Constant bargaining over prices will simply not do. The production of goods is most effectively coordinated by the systemic medium of money. In this sense, money is indeed the best currency. The fact that the market cannot be abolished does not imply, however, that the market can reign freely and does not have to be regulated. The social-democratic project to correct and to limit the social consequences of the market has to be pursued, but the market cannot be replaced by the state (Habermas, 1985). If the planification of the state extends to all forms of exchange, the sphere of individual autonomy is negated as such. The dehumanising effects of the bureaucratisation of the state apparatus are as deleterious as those of the economy, and yet, given the complexity of modern societies, the state can no more wither away than the economy.

Combining the anti-productivistic emphasis of the political with the anti-metaphysical one of systemic realism, we can now draw on Habermas's distinction between the life-world and the system in order to reformulate the meaning of the socialist project (Gorz, 1991; Habermas, 1981; Wellmer, 1993). Neither the market nor the state can be abolished, but they can be democratically 're-embedded' in society in such a way that the reifying impact of money and power on the life-world is reduced. From a Habermasian perspective, the question 'How is socialism possible?' is transformed into the question 'How is a democratic domestication of the systemic structures of the market of the bureaucracy possible?' In other words, how can the democratic impulses emanating from the life-world be mobilised against the system? How can the political forces of communication pressurise the system and make it more responsive to the demands of the life-world? Formulated in this way, the socialist project seems at first to be merely defensive: the task consists of mobilising the associations of the life-world into an anti-systemic social movement which puts democratic pressure on the political system and forces it to regulate and to domesticate the system so that the commodifying logic of the market and the normalising one of the bureaucracy do not transgress the boundaries of the life-world. In so far as the democratic domestication and control of systemic structures aims to guarantee, strengthen and develop the existence of a sphere of communicative conviviality where individuals can freely engage in social actions which are socially useful or rewarding in themselves, even and especially if they are not rewarding in economic terms, the communicative reformulation of the socialist project is not simply defensive. The task consists of exploring alternative ways of life beyond the market and

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the state and to experimentally develop decommodified 'private-public' spaces in which those social activities, which do not primarily pursue economic ends, would be recognised as useful activities, not only for the individuals concerned but also for the integration of society itself .

### A SOCIOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF MARXISM

Work, understood and valued as a productive and creative activity, is an invention of modernity. It emerged in the eighteenth century and will perhaps, like a figure in the sand, disappear again one day in the not too distant future (Arendt, 1959; Méda, 1995). Traditionally, work was considered as a vulgar and degrading activity. In the Bible (e.g. Genesis, III, 17), it is considered as a curse, and in most European languages the association of work with toil (*ponos, labour, travail, Mühe*) still shines through. The Greeks did not value it. Work was good for slaves, and although they produced wealth, they were simply considered by their masters as part of that wealth. Only beyond the realm of necessity did the free and really valuable activities, the theoretical (*theoria*) and the political ones (*praxis*), start. The Romans did not value work either. In fact, it is only in the Christian Middle Ages, when Saint Augustine condemned idleness and exhorted the monks of Carthago to engage in manual work, that the hierarchy between 'noble' and 'vulgar' activities, between the leisurely activities of the aristocracy and the merely useful ones of the plebs, began to be levelled. Later on, during the Reformation, when Luther presented work as a vocation (*Beruf*) and as the best means to honour God, the hierarchy was reversed. Eventually, the British political economists introduced work as the most esteemed of all human activities. Locke grounded private property in work, Adam Smith asserted that labour was the origin of the wealth of nations, and Marx considered it as the first factor of production (before land and capital). Marx not only took over the theory of value from the political economists, however, but drawing on Hegel's 'expressivist' philosophy of work, which considers work as the highest expression of man's creative activity and as the medium of the self-development of humanity, he also provided an anthropological foundation for his critique of the alienation of work under capitalism.

Marx's theory of the alienation of work, developed in the so-called *Paris Manuscripts*, presupposes a normative philosophical anthropology, i.e. a vision of Man as a generic being (*Gattungswesen*), as a fully accomplished human being as he should and will be when he will have fully realised his essential capacities in a full blown communist society (Vandenberghe, 1997: 64–83). Marx attributes the three following ideal predicates to Man as generic being: (i) Man is a productive being, who realises and expresses his essential capacities in and through work. By means of labour, man cultivates nature and inserts himself into the material world, which thereby becomes his world, his work. Ideally, the work expresses and realises the personality of the

worker: the worker recognises the work as his work and recognises and realises himself in his work products which, as Marx says, reflect the essence of Man as 'so many mirrors in which our being shines forth' (Marx, 1968, II: 33). (ii) Work is however not only an instrumental and expressive activity. By essence, it is also a social and implicitly a communicative activity. For Marx, the atomist fiction of an isolated individual who lives and works on his own on a desert island is an absurdity. Man is essentially a social, or as Marx says (quoting Aristotle), a 'political being' (Marx, 1953: 6) that, by interacting with nature, also necessarily interacts and cooperates with his fellows and thereby individualises him- or herself. Cooperation, work and socialisation thus go together. (iii) Man does not only distinguish himself from animals by his work and the cooperative sociability which it implies but also by the fact that by cultivating nature he also cultivates himself and is thus able to escape the natural condition where one has to work for mere survival. Ideally, work is not a means but an end in itself, something one does for its own sake and not for pragmatic reasons.

From this utopian perspective, capitalism appears as a genuine anthropological catastrophe. Indeed, under capitalism, all three of the essential determinations of man disappear, and as a result, man is alienated from his species being and thus from his essential self. (i) First of all, the products of labour no longer reflect the essential capacities of man. The worker no longer recognises himself in the product of his work but confronts it now as something which is alien to him and denies him in his very being as something which turns against him and oppresses him in the form of capital. The underlying reason for this reversal from self-expression to self-denial is exploitation: given that the worker produces a surplus for which he is not paid and which the capitalist pockets, by working, the worker necessarily produces capital, which dominates and oppresses him. (ii) Secondly, work is no longer a medium of sociability. Given that the product of his work is appropriated by the capitalist, the worker is *eo ipso* alienated from him. And he is alienated from his fellow workers as well, not only because he has to compete with them, but also because the distribution of work is no longer arranged on an associative basis of cooperation, but systematically regulated by an anonymous market. Cooperation is replaced by competition and society is kept together by the circulation of commodities. (iii) Finally, when the expressive and communicative dimension of work disappears, work is reduced to instrumental activity, and becomes toil. When it is no longer an end in itself but a means to making a living, when it is no longer free, labour becomes forced labour. What was once the means and the medium of self-expression has now become a mere means of survival.

Although Marx finds the causes of alienation in the division of labour, the market and private property, he conceives of private property as the factor that overdetermines the other factors of the totality. This explains why he can (erroneously) consider that the abolition of private property is not

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only a necessary but also a sufficient condition for the abolition of all forms of alienation – of ‘*Entfremdung*, to be understood by philosophers’ (Marx, 1972, III: 34). With the abolition of private property, work thus regains its essential determination as an end in itself that is at the same time a means of expression and a medium of sociability. Or, as Marx later says in an often quoted line from his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, ‘In a more advanced phase of communist society, . . . work is no longer just a means of keeping alive but has itself become a vital need’ (Marx, 1972, XIX: 21).

The problem with this utopian position is not simply that by identifying work and free play it relapses into the Icarian dreams of a ‘critical-utopian socialism’ à la Fourier. The problem is more that this ‘secularised gospel’ of labour is absolutely inadequate for the present day. There are at least two reasons for that.

(i) Firstly, Marx’s expressivist conception of work does not grasp either the essence of industrial work or that of post-industrial work (Gorz, 1988: Part 1; 1991: 111–34). Inspired as it was by the craftsmanship of the guilds of the middle ages, it failed to capture the functional essence of industrial labour and was thus already anachronistic when Marx formulated it. Given that industrial labour necessarily presupposes a functional division of labour, the factory worker no longer manufactures a complete and finished product. The unity of the product is not an organic one but one which results from the mechanical integration of the parts of the product into an assembled totality. The fragmentation or taylorisation of the product can be reduced by means of a democratisation of the workplace, but the macro-social division of labour cannot be eliminated. In so far as the worker is no longer engaged in a craft but executes a technical function within the framework of an organisation which coordinates the different functions, there will thus always be a remainder of alienation which cannot be eliminated.

Moreover, if Marx’s conception of work is inadequate for the industrial society, it becomes completely inadequate for the emerging ‘post-industrial society’ (Bell, 1974), which is driven by the ‘axial principle’ of knowledge and dominated by the service economy. Indeed, given that Marx defines work generically as the productive intervention of man in the material world, he cannot grasp the contemporary processes of ‘dematerialisation’ which characterise both the productive work of the secondary sector and the service work of the tertiary sector. In the secondary sector, the worker manipulates or produces fewer and fewer material products. His task consists not so much in production as in the control and the government of the process of production. In so far as his skills no longer pertain to the materiality of work as such but to the system of government of the productive process, he is no longer active or productive himself, but as an operator of the machine, he is so to speak ‘in service’. In the tertiary sector, service work is not productive either. White collar and pink-collar workers do not produce anything. Their work is literally ‘dematerialised’. Whether they manipulate information or are

oriented to persons, apart from the fact that they earn a wage, their activities have hardly more in common with those that Marx calls work than the name.

(ii) Secondly and more importantly, in so far as Marx's theory of work focuses unilaterally on the liberation of man in and through work, and not on his liberation from work, the theory of the alienation of labour risks degenerating into an ideology of and for the 'work-based society' which is now passing away. Given the neo-liberal attack on the welfare state and the global politics of 'flexploitation', the imperative to humanise and democratise the conditions of labour which the critique of the alienation of work implies remains certainly important. The utopian attempt of the transnational capitalist class to politically realise the pure models of the free market and thus to forcefully impose a historical regress to the situation from which the socialist project sprang is morally unacceptable and has to be resisted in the name of solidarity through the organised defence of the welfare state (Bourdieu, 1998). Yet, at the same time the critique of alienation hides the fact that a situation of non-alienation can actually be worse than alienation from work itself. Indeed, the hopelessness of the unemployed who are desperately searching for jobs which are no longer there, has shown that the absence of exploitation can be worse than exploitation itself. Excluded from work, the absence of work alienates them from society, and the fact that they are alienated shows that they are not so much 'excluded from' as forcefully 'included in' the work-based society (Forrester, 1996: 20). Having interiorised the official values and the legitimation patterns of the work society, they can hardly imagine a situation where work would have lost the value ascribed to it. As long as work is considered as an obligation and not as a right, as long as incomes are not systematically untied from work, those without work will be forced to continuously express their allegiance to the work ethic, prove that they are willing to work and accept badly remunerated jobs, which means that they will have to accept alienated work to escape the alienating condition of the non-alienation of work.

More generally, in so far as the critique of the alienation of work is inseparable from the glorification of work, it masks the crisis of the work society, denies that the utopian energies of work are largely spent and blocks thereby the definitive breakthrough of a society which will no longer be dominated by work. We are now on the threshold of such a society (Offe, 1985: 129–50). Objectively, work has been displaced from its status as a central and self-evident fact of life. The fact that more and more goods are produced with less and less labour shows that the 'organic composition of capital' has significantly changed. Science and technology, not labour, are now the first and the main force of production. As machines move in, workers move out. Jeremy Rifkin (1995) indicates that in the past, when new technologies have replaced workers in a given sector, new sectors have always emerged to absorb the displaced labourers. Today, however, all three of the

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traditional sectors of the economy – agriculture, manufacturing and service – are experiencing technological displacement, with the result that the white collar occupations that constitute the service sector are now themselves being automated and made redundant. Provocatively, a distinguished laureate of the Nobel prize in economics has already warned that ‘the role of humans as the most important factor of production is bound to diminish in the same way that the role of horses in agricultural production was first diminished and then eliminated by the role of tractors’ (Leontief, quoted by Rifkin, 1995: 5).

Massive unemployment has now become a structural feature of all advanced industrial societies. Nobody can say whether unemployment will rise to 10, 20, 30 or even 50 per cent of the active workforce in the next ten or twenty years, but one thing is sure: Keynesian full employment is over. The traditional strategy for full employment, be it through ‘more growth through more market’ or ‘growth through state intervention’, appears illusory (Offe, 1985: 59–63, 1996: 208–9). If the growth rates which can be secured by the continuous expansive reproduction of capital are uncertain, then those which would produce full employment are wholly uncertain. And even if the strategy of employment through growth were realistic, it would quickly run up against ecological limits. Moreover, subjectively, work is also forfeiting its subjective role as the central motivating force in the activity of workers. Relative to other spheres of life, work has been decentred. The work ethic is in decline, post-materialism is on the rise, and individuals look and find meaning beyond the work sphere. Summarising the actual situation, we can conclude with André Gorz that ‘work is no longer the main social cement, nor the principal factor of socialisation, nor the main occupation of each, nor the principal source of wealth and well being, nor the meaning and the centre of our lives’ (Gorz, 1991: 52).

It is true that in his later writings Marx seriously tempered his youthful enthusiasm for the category of work. In the *Grundrisse*, for example, he claims that the task of man does not consist so much in freeing himself in and through work, but to free himself *from* work thanks to the mechanisation and automation of the activities in the workplace. In this machinist dream, ‘the shuttles weave by themselves’ (Aristotle, quoted by Marx, 1972, XXIII: 430), with the result that men are freed from work and can fully develop themselves in their free time. They can go hunting and raise cattle in the morning, fish in the afternoon and write critical books in the evening. In *Capital*, Fourier’s identification of work and play is definitively rejected and replaced by the classic Aristotelian opposition between necessity and freedom (or production and action), as can be gathered from the famous lines of the Conclusion of the Third Volume of *Capital*: ‘In truth, the reign of freedom only begins the moment where work is no longer dictated by necessity and external means; it is thus situated, by nature, beyond the sphere of production as such’ (Marx, 1972, XXV: 828). If that is the case, then the

reduction of labour time and the shortening of the workday is the condition for the liberation of men through their liberation from work.

With regard to Marx's former conception, this correction is important, because it allows him in principle to overcome the productivist reduction and to reintroduce the primacy of the political. Marx himself never fully made this move, and yet it is crucial, because in the absence of the recognition of the existence of a sphere of action beyond work where meaning is communicatively generated, the utopian perspective of a post-industrial society of 'workers without work', who freely develop themselves by engaging in all kinds of non-productive and non-remunerated activities (e.g. communication, play, study, etc.), turns all too quickly into Arendt's dystopian perspective of a society of workers who are freed from work but who, given that they have lost the dimension of action, no longer know why they are freed. 'It is, writes Arendt, a society of labourers which is about to be liberated from those fetters of labour, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won. . . . What we are confronted with is the perspective of labourers without labour, that is without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse' (Arendt, 1958: 5).

#### **AN IDEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF MARXISM**

A new spectre haunts Europe, the spectre of massive and lasting structural unemployment. Producing more and more goods with less and less labour, late modern industrial society is confronted with the telos of its own abolition. The industrial class of workers of the past has now almost vanished. Substituted by machines, its place has been taken up by a post-industrial 'non-class of non-workers'. Confronted with massive un- and underemployment, which is neither frictional nor conjunctural but structural, the call for 'full employment' no longer appears as an appropriate response. Within the framework of the existing labour market, full employment would be conceivable only under circumstances of a forced 'Brasilianisation of the West' in which the wage levels, social security and working conditions of those in employment markedly deteriorated (Beck, 1999: 93–110). The joke of Craig Miller, a sacked sheetmetal worker in Kansas City, who replied to his wife when he heard the Clinton administration boast of creating a few hundred thousand new jobs: 'Sure, we've got four of them. So what?' (Rifkin, 1995: 167) nicely illustrates that the neo-liberal policy of job creation through exploitation turns the workforce into a class of new poor. Furthermore, the steady rise in the post-war period of post-materialistically inclined individuals in the West, who prefer self-expression, autonomy and quality of life over economic and physical security (Inglehart, 1977), might be a further indication that the resurrection of the goal of full employment is no longer socially desirable. Individuals not only want meaningful work, they want a

meaningful life as well. In the absence of full employment, material security and a meaningful life can only be guaranteed if individual income entitlement is partially or completely decoupled from actual income-earning activity. Such a disjunction of income from work, which would free individuals from work, necessarily presupposes a break with the reigning contractualist philosophy of justice and a breakthrough to a solidarist philosophy of the gift. Given that Marx explicitly maintains the principle of workfare, which links the right to an income to the 'equal obligation of all to work' (Marx, 1972, IV: 481), he cannot conceive of a right to an income which would not be accompanied by a corresponding obligation to work. Consequently, if we want to conceive of the right to an income as an unconditional right which is uncoupled from a duty to work, we have to look elsewhere – although the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* hints to a non-contractualist position.

In his famous *Essay on the gift*, Marcel Mauss formulates an empirically grounded theory of the gift which is able to justify such an unconditional right to income. For Mauss, the gift appears immediately as an ambiguous phenomenon: the gift is free and yet constrained; it cannot be imposed and yet it is obligatory. The gift is free, because it presupposes the spontaneity of the Ego, and yet it is socially constrained. Indeed, a closer look reveals the gift to involve a triple obligation: first, an obligation of Ego to give freely; secondly, an obligation of Alter to accept Ego's gift; and thirdly, an obligation of Alter to return Ego's gift (Mauss, 1950: 205–14). The obligation to give, to receive and to return the gift is not enforceable, however. One is expected to give, but one can no more be forced to give than one can be forced to accept or to return a gift. Considered within this perspective of a socially expected but non-imposable reciprocity, every free offer of goods and services which is effectuated without any guarantee of a return is a gift, as long as the offer is animated by a 'spirit of giving'. The return may be anticipated, but the gift differs from exchange in that the return is not the prime mover of the act. The gift is accepted, the return is deferred, a debt is incurred, and when the gift is eventually returned, the former giver becomes debtor, and far from simply being reproduced, the circle of giving is actually expanded as the debtor becomes giver in his turn. What matters in the gift is thus not the equivalence between the objects of exchange, as is the case with barter and exchange, but the renewed exchange of the positions of the subjects. Given that every gift aims to renew and perpetuate the cycle of reciprocity between subjects, the value of the gift is neither linked to its use – nor to its exchange value. Rather the gift represents and realises a third value: a relational or 'bond value' (Godbout and Caillé, 1992: 244). With the gift, the primacy of the relations between objects, which characterises the relations between subjects – both those that are mediated and alienated by the exchange value of the commodities and those that are mediated but not alienated by the exchange of the use value of goods – thus becomes

secondary and the primacy of relations between subjects is restored. Paraphrasing Marx's characterisation of the commodity fetish (Marx, 1972, XXIII: 86), we could say that the relations between people no longer appear as a relation between things, but that the relations between things now appear as a relation between people.

The gift does not simply pertain to the past. Once it is seen and understood as a formal generator of the social bond, its transhistorical character and paradigmatic relevance for the analysis of the social becomes clear (Caillé, 1996c). If we define 'primary sociability' as the totality of interpersonal relations which take place in the life-world and 'secondary sociability' as the totality of functional or systemic relations which govern the subsystems of the economy and the state (Caillé, 1993: 242–3), it is easy to see that the whole domain of primary sociability is structured by the logic of the gift, at least to the extent that it is not colonised by the impersonal and reifying logic of the domain of secondary sociability. Although the systemic logic of secondary sociability threatens the domain of the primary sociability, the systems of the market and the state could not function if they did not succeed to mobilise the affective energy of the life-world for their own ends. In other words, the domain of secondary sociability is embedded in the domain of primary sociability, but at the same time it threatens to subvert the hierarchical relation and to embed the interpersonal relations in the domain of the secondary sociability. If that were the case, the systemic logic of the market and the state would subvert and replace the logic of the gift, and 'annihilate all organic forms of existence' (Polanyi, 1944: 163), with the result that the relations between persons would be overdetermined by the relation between things and that persons in the life-world would end up treating each other as objects. To bar this tendency, it is important that the associations of the life-world are strengthened and that the subsystems are democratically domesticated so that they do not undermine the integrity of the life-world. Formulated in this way, we can see that the Habermasian and the Maussian reformulation of the project of socialism overlap: the aim of socialism is to democratically limit the reach of the depersonalising rationality of the subsystems of the market and the state in favour of the communicative rationality of the associations of the life-world, or to say the same in terms which are borrowed from Polanyi: the aim is to subordinate the economical and the political subsystems to the social sphere in which they are embedded and to assign them a subordinate place as a means to the social ends which citizens democratically decide to pursue. Moving not between but beyond the neo-liberal Scylla of a market society and the neo-corporatist Charybdis of welfare-statism, the political cum economical project of socialism converges with the aims of an associational democracy which devolves as much of the affairs of society as possible to the publicly funded but voluntary and self-organising associations of the life-world (Hirst, 1993). Given that the aim is not to abolish the market or the state, but that the mobilising force of

solidarity is not undermined by money or power, the point is to find the right policy mix for a plural economy which redefines the traditional relations between the state, the market and the associations in such a way that personally and socially 'useful activities' that are performed outside gainful employment have a chance to flourish and thus to politically reinvigorate the social tissue. As Beck says, the point is to move 'from a society that is centred around work to a new, political society of citizens with cosmopolitan intentions' (Beck, 1999: 126).

Moving now back to the problem of massive unemployment, I would like to explore the 'realist utopia' (Giddens) of a post-work society which is animated by the spirit of the gift: the key to the advent of such a society is the decommodification of work by means of a decoupling of work and income. When work is no longer a means of life and life is no longer dominated by work and money, people can give sense to their life by engaging in free activities which are rewarding in themselves and/or socially useful, even if they are not productive or rewarded by an income. Given that the decommodification of work presupposes a substantive redistribution of public wealth, the state will not wither away. It will have an important role to play, not as a substitute to the market nor as a paternalistic dispenser of services, but as a provider of the public finances necessary to 'complete' the welfare state or, in case a slogan is needed, to assure the passage from the welfare state to the 'welfare society'. In the remaining pages of this article, I would like to explore a 'package solution' for a reorganisation of the labour market consisting of four concrete proposals: (1) reduction of labour time, (2) introduction of a basic or citizen's income guaranteed by the state, (3) development of the social economy of the third sector and (4) extension of the co-operation circles of the informal and non-monetary economy (see also Caillé, 1996a: 127–36 and Offe, 1996: 214–7). In order to avoid the impression that those proposals are just blueprints for castles in the air, I want to note that political economists have already developed macro-economic simulations of the effects of some of the proposals and that they have concluded that they are actually feasible, provided, of course, that they can find sufficient political support from the public. Even without this support, some of the proposals could still be implemented, however, not as a way of realising the utopia of a post-work society, but as a mere pragmatic means of reducing the overpopulated ranks of the army of the unemployed.

(1) Reduction and redistribution of labour time: The reduction of labour time aims not only to redistribute labour – as can be gathered from the Italian slogan: '*lavorare meno per lavorare tutti*' – but also to free individuals from work, so that they have more time at their disposal to engage in free activities (e.g. the contemplation of the True, the Good and the Beautiful or engagement in citizens' work) (Gorz, 1988: Part 3; Beck, 2000). Historically speaking, the politics of a reduction of labour time, which is already under way in Europe, simply prolongs a secular trend. Considering that in the last

fifty years the annual working time has been reduced in France by 45 per cent, that is by 1,379 working hours or the equivalent of 172 days of 8 hours, we could make a case and say that everybody now works part-time. The reduction of labour time can take two forms: either labour time is collectively reduced (e.g. a working week of 35 hours for all employees) or the possibility to reduce labour time is offered on an individual basis to those who want to work less (e.g. part-time work, parental leave, sabbaticals, etc.). Given that the collective reduction of labour time cannot be introduced uniformly in all enterprises and for all staff at the same time, André Gorz 'refunctionalises' the post-fordist entrepreneurial idea of flexibility and proposes a programmed but steady reduction of the average annual labour time on an individual basis. Over a period of 15 or 20 years, the average annual working time should be progressively reduced from the actual 1,600 hours to 1,400 hours, then to 1,200 hours and eventually to 1000 hours per year. 'A thousand hours per year, that can be 20 hours per week in two days and a half, or ten days per month, or twenty-five weeks per year, or ten months stretched over two years, etc.' (Gorz, 1988: 283). Other scenarios are possible. 'We can also define the labour time for a lifetime, for instance 20,000 or 30,000 hours per life, to be stretched over a period of fifty years of potential activity' (idem). Still other scenarios are possible, provided however that the reduction of labour time is not accompanied by a concomitant reduction of income. This is important, because although maintaining the salary would not completely disjunct income from labour as such, in so far as income would become independent from labour time, the reduction of labour time without loss of salary would already represent a first and important step in the direction of a decommodification of the labour market. But is this feasible? Wouldn't it simply jeopardise the competitiveness of enterprises? It would, for sure, but only if enterprises have to pay the entire salary. With the French economist Guy Aznar (1998: 59–64), we can however imagine an alternative scheme where the wage would be made up of two components: a first component which represents a retribution for the actual labour time, and a second one which remunerates the hours of free time. A first cheque, representing the first component, would be paid by the employer; and a second cheque, representing the second component, would be paid by the community and financed by means of taxes, but also and more importantly by a redistribution of the collective gains in productivity ('the machines pay').

(2) Introduction of a basic income: If the reduction of labour time without loss of income partially disconnects labour from earnings, the proposal to introduce a basic income or citizen's wage, which was first suggested by Thomas Paine, reinvented in the sixties by Milton Friedman and re-appropriated in the eighties by a multitude of sociologists, economists and philosophers on the left (Ferry, 1995; *Revue du MAUSS*, 1996; Van Parijs, 1992), completely severs income and labour. Granted by virtue of mere citizenship, the basic income can be defined as 'an income unconditionally

paid to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement' (Van Parijs, 1992: 3). In other words, as a kind of unilateral gift, the state would grant a basic lump sum to all of its adult citizens, regardless of their past, present or future position on the labour market. Irrespective of their wage-earning biography or willingness to work, all individuals, including the millionaires and those who already have a secure income, would thus receive a 'demogrant' which is in principle sufficient to satisfy their vital or basic needs. In this respect, the basic income differs from current guaranteed minimum incomes or existing unemployment benefits not only because it is compatible and cumulable with other incomes but also because individuals would not be obliged to make themselves available on the formal labour market either. Thanks to this unconditionality, the basic income becomes irrevocable, which explains why its introduction would definitively open up the 'unemployment trap'. In any case, individuals would have a real choice between the high income – high work option and the lower income – lower work one. As a result, the labour market would become more flexible, but given that workers would in principle be able to live from their basic income alone, dehumanising work conditions would almost disappear, as individuals would be better able to resist exploitation and to refuse alienation. In any case, they would have the opportunity to engage in activities which are personally more meaningful or socially more useful than those that are economically more rewarding. At this point, the justification for the unilateral gift by the state becomes clear: although the state cannot enforce a return, it somehow expects a return, not in the form of productive activities, but in the form of citizens' initiatives which strengthen the associational life of society (Caillé, 1996b).

Replacing the idea of equivalence or reciprocity by that of need – 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' – the idea of a basic income has been described as the 'capitalist road to communism' (Van der Veen and Van Parijs, 1986). Realising the right to welfare without imposing a corresponding obligation to workfare, it breaks with the 'norm of reciprocity' and institutionalises the 'norm of beneficence', the norm which 'calls on men to give something for nothing' (Gouldner, 1973: 266). 'Something for nothing', is that not equivalent to offering a free lunch to all? Is it feasible? Apparently it is. First of all, if a basic income were introduced, substantive enough to cover basic expenses, the current levels of social security, pensions, unemployment benefits, student grants, tax relief, and so on, to which about 30 per cent of the GDP is actually devoted, could be eliminated. Secondly, if the basic income were not nominally fixed at a certain amount (say, 400 euros) but determined as a certain percentage of the GDP (e.g. between 30% and 50%) which is to be redistributed among the population, a feedback mechanism assuring its sustainability would be automatically built in the scheme (de Beer, 1995). Indeed, if citizens would simply be content with the basic income without seeking to contribute with any activities to the

wealth of the nation, the GDP would decrease as would the basic income, and the idle ones who live, as parasites as it were, from the basic income would be the first ones to be penalised. Thirdly, technically speaking, the basic income could be conceived as a negative income tax. Assuming that a given financial threshold (break-even point) were determined, all actual incomes below the threshold would be topped up by the state till they reached the level of the basic income. All incomes beyond the threshold, on the other hand, would be taxed by the state, so that they would positively contribute to the public finances. Thanks to the progressive nature of the taxation system, a financial redistribution of the incomes would thus be automatically realised. Fourthly, the introduction of a guaranteed minimum income could be associated with the introduction of a maximum income, ecotaxes, cuts in defense programmes and subsidies to corporations. Finally, one could follow up the propositions of the Nobel prize winner Tobin and introduce a tax on the speculative capital of the exchange market. Given that 1,000 billion dollars circulate daily on this market, a small taxation of, say, 1 per cent would generate 300 billion dollars per year, which could then be used to finance a basic income. However, given that such a reform could only work on a truly global basis, it is true that the creation of such a sort of counter-IMF seems a bit unrealistic. Nevertheless, in France, an association called ATTAC which militates for the introduction of such a tax has recently been launched by the editor of *Le monde diplomatique*.

(3) Development of the social economy: The purpose of the introduction of a basic income, guaranteed by the state, becomes concrete and tangible with and within the so-called social economy of the informal or voluntary sector (Beck, 1999: 122–51; Eme and Laville, 1994: Part II; Ferry, 1995; Revue du MAUSS, 1998; Rifkin, 1995: part V). The term social economy refers to this hybrid ill-defined sector of the economy in which people voluntarily offer their personal services to selected individuals or associations for non-profit ends. Running errands for the disabled in the neighbourhood, being a buddy to an HIV-positive, volunteering at the fire brigade, cooking for the multicultural *café-musique*, proofreading the articles for 'Red Pepper', selling calendars for animal welfare or civil rights organisations, organising the yearly May ball of the 'Jolly Pipers', those are just a few examples of those relational services of the social sector in which people invest themselves and to which they freely give their time, without expecting material returns, because of a sense of loyalty or even duty to the community. In so far as those convivial activities are personally gratifying and socially useful, this relational sector represents in fact a 'utopian sector which honours the ancient utopias of non alienated work' (Ferry, 1995: 105).

Re-embedded in the life-world, the social economy does not follow the logic of the market, but the logic of the gift. People give time, and they give freely because they have interiorised the norm of solidarity. Work in the third sector, even when it is paid, is not motivated primarily by material interests,

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but, as Weber would have said, by 'ideal interests' of sociability and solidarity. Relational activities make sense, not only because they offer the stability of an employment to a substantive number of people (e.g. 6.9% of total workforce in the United States, 4.2% in France, 3.7% in Germany) but also because by inserting people in the community they renew the bonds of sociability and strengthen the associations. And as Tocqueville (1961, II: 154–60) had already noted a hundred and fifty years ago, by strengthening the associations, they also strengthen democracy and keep the soft but all pervasive despotism of a paternalistic state under control.

Combining the logic of the reciprocal gift with the competitive logic of the free market and the redistributive logic of the egalitarian state, the associative sector, where most of the relational services are concentrated, is an institutional hybrid of the market, the non-market and the non-monetary economy. Given that the associations do not in the first place aim to make a profit, the voluntary participation of their members and the sales of the services or products they offer are in general not sufficient to keep their businesses financially afloat. 'Entrepreneurial militantism' does not pay. Charitable gifts from individuals or enterprises may help, but given their social utility and the reduction of the unemployment figures they make possible, it makes sense to expect an extra contribution from public finances. Although this would de facto transform civic associations into 'semi-public' or 'para-static' institutions, if they are to escape the formal rigidity and depersonalisation which characterises the public services, it is important that they remain embedded in the life-world. In order to avoid too much interference from the state, we could hand over the regulation to the citizens and imagine a reformed associative system in which they would be issued a certain amount of vouchers for the support of associations, which they could then distribute to the associations of their choice, which could exchange them for public funds from the general budget (Schmitter, 1995).

(4) Extension of the co-operation circles of the informal and non-monetary economy: The small scale experiments with moneyless exchange and cooperation circles, which were initiated in the nineteenth century by Owen and Proudhon, re-emerged again in the crisis laden conjuncture of the eighties in the form of LETS, or local exchange trading systems (Bayon and Servet, 1998; Lang, 1994; Offe and Heinze, 1992). Cooperation circles can be defined as self-regulating, informal, community-based trading networks that use local currency to facilitate the indirect exchange of services and goods between participants of the association. The particularity of this socio-local economic system is that it does not use conventional money as a formal medium of exchange but a local currency (e.g. Bobbins in Manchester, New berries in Newbury) which is based on time units and which cannot be used outside the community. Although the cooperation circles do not aim to become self-sufficient or to replace the formal economy – they run parallel to it – the introduction of time as measure and medium of exchange

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necessarily puts the monetary market out of action, thus allowing those who have no money but plenty of time to offer to buy services which they otherwise could not afford. Indeed, thanks to the substitution of money by a time currency, all the persons who are taking part in the exchange network can purchase services from one another without money, provided that they are prepared to offer services in exchange. The list of services that are on demand and those that are on offer in the community are displayed in a directory. Those services typically include a mixture of manual, intellectual and relational activities such as vehicle maintenance, gardening, ironing, teaching, babysitting or therapeutic services. All transactions of the community are communicated to the treasurer of the association. Acting as a local bank, he registers all the transactions and keeps an account of the balances of credits and debts. Given that the co-operation circle is not motivated by profit, interest is neither collected nor paid. Even more, within limits, members are encouraged to contract debts. By spending time units which they have not yet earned, they are supposed to provide others with a claim on their own future services. In LETS jargon, this is described as 'being in commitment', not as going into debt (Lang, 1994: 9). To understand this transvaluation of debts into good deeds, which Offe and Heinze call 'micro-Keynesianism' (Offe and Heinze, 1994: 98), it is important to see that the circles of co-operation are actually animated by the spirit of the gift. It is because others have given their services that they are committed to return the gift. In accordance with the logic of 'serial reciprocity' (Boulding), those services do not have to be returned to the person from whom the earlier service was received, but they can be performed for any other member of the community. This shows the 'holistic' character of the association: the community has primacy over the individual, which is just another way of saying that relations between persons have primacy over relations between things (Dumont, 1977). From this perspective, we can see that in the co-operation circles it is not so much individuals who exchange services and objects, as subjects who meet each other through the exchange of services and objects. The parallel economy cannot and should not replace the formal economy, but for the unemployed and the others who are excluded and have nothing to lose, it is not only a way of saving money or working without being employed but also perhaps a way of gaining a sense of community and thereby regaining a sense of humanity.

**Frédéric Vandenberghe** is a Research Fellow at the University for Humanist Studies, Utrecht, The Netherlands. His latest book is entitled, *La sociologie de Georg Simmel* (La Decouverte, Collection Reperes, Paris, 2001).  
[email: f.vandenberghe@uvh.nl]

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