

ANALYSIS AND SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS ON DIGITAL/PLATFORM CAPITALISM

This are the conclusions on the preparatory session hold by the *Grupo de Estudios Críticos*, for the 13th of September seminar with Tiziana Terranova and Trebor Scholz. The discussion on the preparatory session was based on the review of their selected works for the session.

ANALYSIS: Relevant aspects in understanding the issue

1. Deregulation of economic activity and the role of governments/public institutions

The development of platform capitalism has been gone together with a process of *de facto* deregulation of economic activity, including the loss of protection for worker's and consumers' rights. This implies a change in the role of the nation-state and other public institutions (such as de UE) in their relation with companies, helping out in the development of digital capitalism.

2. Subjectivity and discourse

The growth of digital capitalism takes place in a sociocultural climate of acceptance of its model, rooted on an individualist and consumerist (neoliberal) subjectivity that approves and supports its practices. The hegemonic discourses promoted in the media, marketing and other professionals (such as advocates of the so called "*Sharing Economy*") strengthen this social climate of acceptance and the development of individualistic subjectivities.

3. Appropriation / use and control of cooperación (Free or precarious labor)

The main aspect of platform capitalism is the way in which it is able to appropriate the fruits of cooperation and the social collaboration that is generated in its spaces (although it does not appropriate it as an external agent, but instead generates spaces where it grows and nourishes that cooperation). The cybernetic control of the exchange system allows capital to design work an cooperation spaces for its benefit, which is equivalent to governing the productive mega-machinery that the postoperístas refer as *General Intellect*.

4. Opportunities for cooperation

Either way, it seems it's not possible to erase the creative impulse for cooperation/collaboration which animated the gift economy from the first Internet and in human history. It is a potentiality that is still alive, in spite of the constant appropriation-manipulation which is subjected to. This opens a door of hope for the development of new initiatives, not appropriated / manipulated by capital.

5. Social class, cognitariat and immaterial work

Finally, it was found very important to pay attention to class relations that occur within digital platforms, and the way in which the material conditions affect their development as well as the emergence of alternatives. In this sense, we should consider immaterial work as the creative aspect that exists in all work, and whose energy must be freely available (such as labor that is not appropriate / manipulated) to be able to think or design alternatives, be them cooperativist or political.

The future of work

In addition, we can also approach this analysis from the perspective of the future of work.

We need to understand how the Internet has changed the nature of work, and what is the role of digital platforms in this process:

- First, platforms redefined cognitive work as a new form of consumption, taking advantage of content, data and user attention to generate value (usually through advertising).
- Then they transferred that model to the exchange of goods and services, going on to manage digital markets that draw on private resources. Thus, the platforms become distributors of goods and jobs, provided precarious works and lives.
- In the last phase, the leap towards the final automation of work is contemplated.

At this point, we must ask ourselves what will happen to the work and how the money will be distributed, what will happen to the labor surplus. (Question addressed in Morozov's seminar).

Platform cooperativism can be a way to mobilize live work and maintain networks of solidarity. But it can also be an escape route to keep under control the tensions generated by a growing inequality system.

SOLUTIONS / ALTERNATIVES: Relevant aspects in searching for solutions or alternatives to digital capitalism.

1. Cooperativism as a partial or insufficient solution

Cooperativism alone is a partial and insufficient solution, although it can be a relevant element within an ecology of initiatives or projects which aim to offer solutions. It could be part of the Red Stack Attack.

The question then would be what kind of cooperativism could contribute to aim for solutions? To what extent is it different from other cooperativisms well integrated into the capitalist system?

2. Rejection of the fetishism of the cooperative legal form

Cooperativism as a legal form can respond to different organizational models, and in itself it does not pose a challenge for capitalism. What really matters is the objective behind the cooperative association, not its legal form. In this sense, to aim for a solution cooperativism needs to have a political dimension, which is the case when there is: a) the need for collective survival (like in the occupation of industries in Argentina), and/or b) a political project which explicitly rejects the capitalist logics, based on the concentration of wealth and the externalization of costs.

3. The Political turn: the need to face the challenge of digital capitalism as a political issue

The development projects of digital capitalism touches key social/public problems, such as the transportation model, the housing model, the labor model, the logistics distribution model, etc. That is why it is necessary to face their challenge as a political issue, opening the debate on what kind of cities, transport and housing models we want: fair, ecological and feminist.

4. Limit, regulate and confront the perverse effects of digital capitalism

Only from an explicit political positioning is it possible to recover the capacity to confront and regulate the activity of these platforms and their perverse effects. On the other hand, the exploited population itself should reject these extractive models of consumption. On the one hand, public institutions should respond by truly exercising their role as protectors of public space and social rights (although it is alarming we have to remember it).

5. Change in discursive hegemony and social subjectivity.

To achieve the political turn, we need to regenerate a more conscious social subjectivity. For that, it is important to develop new/more critical discourses, and the ability to "crumble" (deeply analyse and expose) the political and social conflicts caused by platform capitalism. This requires a critical cognitive work (which usually is precarious) to generate public discourse judgment capable of facing the legitimation and ideological discourses promoted by digital capitalism.

Características a tener en cuenta para un cooperativismo transformador

Para que la propuesta del cooperativismo de plataformas sirva como solución al capitalismo digital, hay que replantearse cuestiones como:

- Marco regulatorio que necesitan: en línea con el giro político.
- Infraestructuras: cómo se producirá el código libre para esas plataformas, o los recursos para alojarlas y gestionarlas.
- Ética y Human Rights by design: además del co-diseño, hasta qué punto es necesario comprometerse en la defensa de la privacidad y otros derechos by design. ().
- Subjetividad: cómo afectará a la producción de subjetividades, si realmente va asociado a una nueva forma de relacionarse o es más de lo mismo.
- Plusvalías: como se distribuye la obtención del beneficio, ¿va solo hacia los trabajadores-propietarios, o se distribuye por toda la plataforma y la sociedad?

Requirements for a transformative cooperativism

For the platform cooperativism proposal to aim at a solution to digital capitalism, it is necessary to rethink issues such as:

- Regulatory framework: what is needed in terms of protection for cooperatives, which touches on the political turn.
- Infrastructures: how to produce the free code for those platforms, or the resources to host and manage them.
- Ethics and Human Rights by design: in addition to co-design, to what extent it is necessary to commit to the defense of privacy and other rights by design.
- Subjectivity production: how it will affect the production of subjectivities, if it is really associated with a new way of relating or is more of the same.
- Wealth distribution: how is the profit obtained distributed, does it only go to the worker-owners, or is it distributed throughout the platform and society?