The biopolitics of community economies in the era of the Anthropocene

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Abstract

In a recent essay Michael Hardt gives voice to a widespread discontent with the left-academic project of critique, stemming from its failure to deliver on its emancipatory promises. Scholarship, in geography and many other social science disciplines is dominated by a pre-occupation with charting the intricate connections between neoliberal governance and an expansive capitalism. As Hardt and many others have observed, the process of critical exposure fails to incite a political response from broader publics. As an alternative to the failed politics of critique, Hardt — inspired by Foucault's engagement with the cynics—argues for a practice of militant biopolitics—an autonomous mode of reflecting, thinking and acting together that eschews expert knowledge. In this paper I argue that the pioneering work of Gibson-Graham and scholars inspired by their work can be seen as a form of militant biopolitics. Collaborative and participatory forms of research and working with others, become the basis for engaging with and transforming economies and human interactions with ecologies. Beyond generating critical awareness, this scholarship aims at producing a post-capitalist politics.

Keywords: Gibson-Graham, diverse economies, biopolitics, critique, post-capitalism

Résumé

Dans un article récent, Michael Hardt donne la parole à un mécontentement avec le projet académique de la gauche, les critiques émanant de son incapacité à tenir ses promesses d'émancipation. Les études en géographie et bien d'autres disciplines des sciences sociales est dominé par une pré-occupation avec la compréhension des liens complexes entre la gouvernance néolibérale et un capitalisme expansive. Comme Hardt et bien d'autres l'ont observé, le processus d'exposition critique ne parvient pas à inciter une réponse politique a al part des publics plus larges. Comme une alternative à la politique de la critique, Hardt - inspirés par l'engagement de Foucault avec les cyniques - plaide pour une pratique de la biopolitique militant. Il s'agit d'un mode autonome de réfléchir, de penser et d'agir ensemble qui évite le savoir des experts. Dans cet article, je soutiens que le travail de Gibson-Graham et des chercheurs inspirés par leur travail peut être vu comme une forme de biopolitique militants. La recherche collaborative / participative et de travailler avec d'autres, deviennent la base pour s'engager avec et la transformation des économies et les interactions humaines avec l'écologie. En plus d'aider la sensibilisation des économies alternatives, ce travail vise à produire une politique post-capitalistes.

Mots-clés: Gibson - Graham, diverses économies, biopolitique, critique, post-capitalisme

Resumen

Michael Hardt en un reciente ensayo da voz a un descontento generalizado con el proyecto de crítica de la izquierda-académica, derivado de su incapacidad para cumplir con sus promesas emancipadoras. La investigación, en geografía y muchas otras disciplinas de las ciencias sociales es dominada por una pre-ocupación con cartografiar las conexiones intrincadas entre la gobernanza neoliberal y un capitalismo expansivo. Como Hardt y muchos otros han observado, el proceso de exposición crítica falla al incitar una respuesta política de públicos más amplios. Como una alternativa a las fallidas políticas de crítica, Hardt, inspirado por el compromiso de Foucault con los cínicos, argumenta a favor de una práctica de biopolítica militante – un modo autónomo de reflexionar, pensar y actuar juntos que evite el conocimiento experto. En este artículo argumento que el trabajo pionero de Gibson-Graham y académicos inspirados por su trabajo pueden ser vistos como una forma de biopolítica militante. Formas colaborativas y participativas de investigación y trabajo con otros, se vuelven la base para comprometerse con y transformar economías e interacciones humanas con ecologías. Más allá de generar consciencia crítica, esta investigación busca producir una política post-capitalista.

Palabras clave: Gibson-Graham, economías diversas, biopolítica, crítica, post-capitalismo

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1. Introduction

> In our discussion of the academic subject, we have advocated an open, concerned, and connected stance and a readiness to explore rather than judge, giving what is nascent and not fully formed some room to move and grow. We have also broached the power and responsibility that devolves upon scholars once we acknowledge the performativity of our teaching and research. When ontology becomes the effect rather than the ground of knowledge, we lose the comfort and safety of a subordinate relation to 'reality' and can no longer seek to capture accurately what already exists; interdependence and creativity are thrust upon us as we become implicated in the very existence of the worlds that we research. Every question about what to study and how to study it becomes an ethical opening; every decision entails profound responsibility. (Gibson-Graham 2008: 620)

The Community Economies Collective (CEC) is an international group of interdisciplinary activist scholars that has coalesced around the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham, most notably *The end of capitalism* (1996) and *Postcapitalist politics* (2006). I have participated in the CEC since its inception. Its collective approach to research and scholarship has functioned as a context for making sense of academic practice but also as a space for developing new practices that connect theory and research to political engagement with social, economic and ecological matters of concern.

Like the other essays in this special issue (Boone and Shear 2014; Grasseni 2014; Shear 2014), CEC scholarship focuses on producing knowledge of the economic landscape that challenges the dominance and singularity of capitalism, describing instead an economic space populated by diverse practices, relationships and institutions. Gibson-Graham see the production of knowledge about economic difference as an attempt at changing the world, "in small and large ways" that proceeds, initially, by reframing how we understand the economy (2008). This central proposition of CEC work is performative: seeing the economy as different suggests that it could always be otherwise and that we transform economic space in our attempts to understand it. It does not follow that the emergence of this other world is at all easy—the difficulties in shifting our own conceptions, habits and practices are a testament to this.

As Gibson-Graham note, what comes along with this possibility is a different sense of ethics—one in which we are at once more responsible *for* and less certain *about* the outcomes of the decisions we make. In the 1990s many people were convinced that global free market capitalism and parliamentary democracy was the end of history. Given the disappearance of actually existing socialist alternatives, perhaps none were more convinced of this proposition than the anti-capitalist left. It was lonely work for Gibson-Graham (1996) to argue in *The end of capitalism* that capitalism's hegemony, its apparent ubiquity, was an effect of our understanding. It was hard for many to swallow the idea that a different theorization of economy might lead us to see non-capitalist relationships, spaces, practices, and institutions in rich and poor countries world-wide. In their view the dominant practices of the left academy—studying, documenting, and decrying capitalism—were complicit in securing its hegemony by continuously re-enforcing, what they refer to as *capitalocentrism* (Burke and Shear 2014).

A decade and a half later, the situation is quite different— simultaneously more hopeful and sobering. World Social Forums, the emergence of solidarity economy movements globally, and a restive political spirit all suggest another world is possible (eg. Allard *et al.* 2008, Grasseni 2014; Roelvink 2010). At the same time this moment in history is sobering because, as the introduction of this special issue discusses, we find ourselves in a crisis with at least two dimensions. For a great many, the Global Financial Crisis starting in 2007, the subsequent anemic recovery and widening wealth inequalities are evidence that another economy is needed. Casting its shadow over the sputtering global growth machine is a recognition that we have entered a new epoch in earth's history, the Anthropocene, in which human industrial activity has become a driving force affecting the atmosphere, biosphere, lithosphere and hydrosphere (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010). From the crisis of peak resource extraction to climate change it is clear that if humanity cannot find a way to go forward toward this other world in "another mode," as eco-feminist Val Plumwood (2008: 1) puts it, another world will find its way towards us—certainly one less felicitous if not cruel to the continuity of life.

In an exceptionally optimistic moment Žižek (2011), speaking at Occupy in Zuccotti Park, responded to those who dismissed this movement as deluded and starry eyed by pointing out that the real delusion is that things can go on as they have done. 'Exceptional' because Žižek's many theoretical interventions demonstrate the power of disavowal—people's capacity for acting as if things can go on precisely as they have. For Žižek, it is easier to imagine the end of the world, than to imagine the collapse of "capitalism". This brings us to a another dimension of our present state, which is a crisis of imagination and desire. We may be able to imagine another world but the question is whether or not we can sincerely believe that we can bring it into existence—understanding that if *we* do not find a way, no one will. It is in relation to this third dimension of the crisis that a new approach to academic practice might be most relevant.

What the ecological and economic crisis calls for is a different way of living in the world, new forms of self-understanding and collective recognition of human and planetary needs and above all new ways of practicing economic relationships, including human engagements with the natural world. In short, profoundly different projects are required, including academic ones, for those of us who desire to bring this other world more fully into being. Towards that I end I will make the following argument in this paper: the evolving work of the CEC is part of a larger movement (that includes the Social and Solidarity Economy) that seeks to inaugurate a new intellectual and political project. The activist research of the CEC is directed by three ideas:

1) the economy as a space of difference,
2) research as part of a political practice of open-ended ethical negotiation, and
3) the importance of learning to be affected in the era of the Anthropocene.

In my view the CEC activist scholarship, shaped by these three ideas, offers a concrete example of what Michael Hardt (2011) calls for in his reformulation of the enlightenment: a collective exit from the minority and the development of a militant biopolitics which takes life itself as a central concern. One way in which the CEC practices a militant biopolitics is through an approach to community based action research, a research agenda that is in my view consonant with a different politics and practice of development.

In the section that follows, I attempt to understand the limits of intellectual "critique" that has been the central project of the academic left for the last several decades. In the second section I attempt to further elaborate on CEC scholarship as a potential version of a militant biopolitics centered on a vision of activist research where economy, place, community and relationships with ecology are regarded as scenes of ethical negotiation. In my view, what makes the CEC's approach to scholarship "militant" is (not only) its commitment to engaging open-ended collaborative research but its collective insistence that enacting a post-capitalist research and politics is possible: an approach to economy where the present landscape is populated with non-exploitative, communal and collective social relations as well as the formation of economies directed by shared ethical commitments rather than expert knowledge.

2. From critique to economic difference

> For over the last couple of decades, what we call "the Left" has come to be organized, in large part, around the project of resisting and refusing harmful new developments in the world. This is understandable, since so many developments have indeed been highly objectionable. But it has left us with a politics largely defined by negation and disdain. (Ferguson 2009: 166)

> Critique has become the primary mode of practicing theory, at least theory conceived as a political intervention, and yet I sense today a growing dissatisfaction with the political capacities of critique. … The differences among these modes of critique are significant, but all of them today face the charge that they are insufficient as political methods insofar as they lack the capacity both to transform the existing structures of power and to create alternative social arrangements. I suspect, in fact, that the persistence of melancholy as a primary affect of much contemporary theory derives from the recognition of this inability of

> critique to fulfill its transformative promises. And yet such expressions of dissatisfaction with critique generally are not accompanied by propositions of a different practice of theory as political intervention. (Hardt 2011: 19)

The psychic price of critique

For progressive academics in the social sciences and humanities, the political project of the last half century is directed at generating a critical understanding of capitalist economies and the systems of governance associated with neoliberalism. Hardt (2011), along with others, suggests that there is a growing dissatisfaction with the political efficacy of the critical project as it is applied to neoliberalism or capitalism, and dissatisfaction in its inability to generate an alternative.

The CEC is certainly directed by a desire to locate academic practice in something else besides "critique" but, for much of the academy, critique remains the primary, if not the only, political project. It is not an overstatement to say that tracing the connections between free market capitalism and neoliberal approaches to governance has been an almost singular obsession for geographers and many other social scientists in recent decades. To name but a very few examples, David Harvey (e.g. 2000, 2005, 2012), Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (2002), and Neil Smith *et al.* (2012) amongst many others have described in detail how shifts in state policy have allowed for a dismantling of the welfare state and the reorientation of state policy towards (renewed) capital accumulation. The Global Financial Crisis of the 2000s has done little to provide people with more insight into the connection between neoliberal statecraft and capital accumulation, and of course in their view, the GFC, rather than killing the neoliberal project, has simply prompted governments to facilitate capital accumulation by other means such as friendly interventions into finance and real estate markets (Peck 2010). Like the GFC, the ecological crisis figures in much the same way. Others have pointed out that the neoliberal mantra of individual culpability, risk calculation, private property, expert management (whether of markets or state policy) have been extended into how states attempt to deal with emergent ecological realities (e.g. Fletcher 2010; West 2006).

Concurrent with this critical project, psychoanalytic theorists have charted the shift in subjective disposition that has, in their view, accompanied the emergence of neoliberal capitalism. Isin (2004) identifies a paradox of the neoliberal ideological project. Far from engendering a rational, utility maximizing subject, the privileging of personal responsibility and risk calculation seem far more likely to engender a neurotic subject driven by chronic fear, rather than confident expressions of preference. McGowan (2003) and Salecl (2011) carry this analysis further. They name the present period the "society of enjoyment" in which social relations of obligation to others and duty have been replaced by an imperative command to enjoy. They argue that one effect of enshrining individual choice in governance and self-conception is the creation of an unbearable anxiety as people attempt to navigate from one choice to the next—not just the choice of consumer goods and services but choice of one's personal style, who to marry, where to live, etc. While choice may be infinite and inexhaustible, people are not, and the demand that we optimize our enjoyment generates anxiety and shame as every choice we make involves loss and failure to enjoy. For Salecl (2011) the one coping mechanism available to someone laboring under the tyranny of choice is to employ the help of experts—from counselors to fashion experts—in order to ensure that one is making the right choice.

In my view it is only in refracting the dissatisfaction with critical scholarship in this way through the lens of psychoanalytic theory that we can begin to understand why "critique" is not just dissatisfying but debilitating. Let us imagine how a typical undergraduate student at an American university might encounter and make sense of critiques of neoliberal capitalism's negative impacts. It is easy to imagine how such a person—saddled by college debt, anxious about his or her future or overworked in response to their own precarity—may all too clearly understand their situation. The hopeful expectation that attends "critique" is the familiar proposition: knowledge of the outrageous condition might generate social movements. In this, the critic places his or her "abiding faith" in what Sedgwick (2003) calls "the power of exposure." While it's not impossible that reading the latest article by Jamie Peck or David Harvey could play a role in constituting a politics of outrage, it's far from clear that this "exposure" has reliable politicizing effects. Lyon-Callo (2013: 1) recently worried that our best efforts in teaching this mode of critique creates "expert pessimists." Certainly there is no guarantee that exposing students (or popular audiences, or even ourselves) to the latest findings that the early effects of extreme climate change are already in evidence will serve as a catalyst for mass collective action. It is just as easy to imagine that "exposure" to critique may lead to feelings of frustration and despair, and thus a reinvestment in individualized solutions to social problems and a resolve to employ the right experts to determine the correct path to career happiness and marital bliss, no matter the odds (Lyon-Callo 2010; Shear and Burke 2013; Shear and Zontine 2010).

The new enlightenment

In an attempt to formulate an alternative to the political project of critique, Hardt calls upon Foucault's reimagining of Kant's notion of enlightenment. For Kant enlightenment was a process of obtaining moral maturity, what he refers to as "exiting the minority" by exercising autonomy in thought and action (Hardt 2011: 21). By that term he means coming of age, and also the cultivation of a capacity for self-reflective, deliberative action, as opposed to our behavior being determined by idiosyncrasy, custom or religious ritual. Exiting from the minority was best achieved in the realm of the public. Consideration of others along with oneself is a means for escaping the provincialism of oneself (Hardt 2011: 21). Enlightenment requires a shift in perspective, a spirit of critical inquiry which calls into question what one has thought and what one has been thoughtless about.

If enlightenment as a political project is grounded in critique, what went wrong? According to Hardt and Foucault, Kant was aware of an internal contradiction in the project of enlightenment itself. While the ambition was for universal enlightenment, a collective exodus from the minority, the process itself installed experts, identified by Kant as the philosopher, the theologian and the physician, who engage in the work of critical thinking *on our behalf*. Quite simply if I am told how to be rational by one expert, what to eat by another, and how to behave by a third—I remain passive, disengaged in the work of critical reflection and thus ultimately incapable of governing my own conduct in relation to others. As Hardt summarizes:

> The legitimate usage of understanding, practical reason, and judgment proposed in Kant's critiques are all bound by this paradox. Intellectuals and social leaders, even when they preach autonomy, by their authority alone, generate obedience. (Hardt 2011: 24)

In public the majority participates only vicariously in debates, through experts, while exercising enlightenment thinking only in the sphere of private life. As Hardt explains, while Kant may have wanted humanity to exit the minority by coming of age, his social conservatism prevented him from imagining how the majority might collectively exit from a second minority of governance by expert rule.

How does the paradox of Kant's enlightenment pertain to the contemporary situation? In my view in two ways: both as a way of understanding how what we call neoliberal governance is connected to economic space and subjectivity, and in relation to the limits of the political project of critique. First, certainly what we call neoliberalism treats the economy as an object to be governed by what Timothy Mitchell (2002, 2008) describes as the rule of experts, a biopower that limits the ability of the majority to exit the minority. We should be careful to note, that this governance takes the form of particular policies and practices—from monetarism, to taxation policy—that may or may not reproduce something that resembles "neoliberalism." Nonetheless, it would appear that what we call neoliberalism—which seeks to enshrine individual choice and minimize government interference in life—remains trapped in the paradox of enlightenment. A minority in the private and public sector make decisions that powerfully shape economies, and by extension our relation to ecologies, while the majority exercise autonomy in only limited ways, for example "choosing" a career, or how much to engage in consumption. If they are lucky enough to be in the right country and the right socio-economic quintile they can consult a variety of experts while exercising this private "autonomy."

What should not be lost here is that this paradox of enlightenment encompasses the contemporary practice of critical scholarship. Here too, the expert as critic is ultimately charged with having a theoretical understanding of the relationship between capitalist economic organization and governance as well as charting its affective, emotional, and political implications. What Hardt seems to be suggesting in the quote I began this section with, is that critical scholarship, despite its best intentions, keeps its audience in the position of the minority if only because it requires nothing further of them. It is of course, theoretically possible for many people to produce their own critical understanding, but the limits of such a practice, the reason why it keeps us in the minority, is that it suggests no other action apart from generating this critical awareness.[2]

Reimagining enlightenment

For Hardt, what is required is a reconceptualization of enlightenment. Hardt makes use of some of Foucault's last scholarly efforts to make two suggestions. First, he suggests that we reject the conservative Kantian formulation of the public *versus* private divide. Kant himself argued that enlightenment is not an individual project: it is difficult to navigate one's way out of one's own pathological, idiosyncratic way of thinking using only yourself as a reference point. Enlightenment, he insists is not just being critical of governance to be governed less, it means free and autonomous individuals must step up the task of *collectively* governing themselves. Second, he uses Foucault's engagement with the cynics of ancient Greece to suggest both a different object for a politics of enlightenment *and a different process*.

Hardt, following Foucault, finds an alternative path to the enlightenment that we might take as a starting point for an alternative to neoliberal biopower. In place of being governed through biopower, or endlessly critiquing it, Hardt argues for the development of a militant biopolitics. What is that, and how does it work? From Hardt we get a sketch that draws from Foucault's focus, in the last years of his life, on the politics of truth in ancient Greece, and the cynics in particular. The central concern of the cynics was the constant interrogation of the "mode of life," and the process of *parrhesia*—telling the truth about one's life. For Foucault, the cynics' flaunting of social convention, their militant commitment to identifying with the abject and the marginal was a means of self-crafting through truth telling. Like performative speech *parrhesia* is a speech act that is constitutive of reality—producing a truth effect in the one speaking and those listening.

> The Cynics inherit from Socrates the focus on life and the identification of truth telling with the true life, but they change it radically. Rather than the project to know oneself and care for oneself, the Cynics aim, on the one hand, to attack the self in order to make it new, and on the other, they refuse to separate the care of the self from the care of humanity, the government of the self from the government of others, which they seek equally to attack and to transform. The only way to discover such a life, a new life, a life transformed, is to transform our world, to make of this world another world. (Hardt 2011: 31)

Drawing on Foucault, Hardt sees the cynics as the original practitioners of what he designates as militant biopolitics. Not aiming to be governed less, they aim to govern themselves collectively and, in so doing, offer an alternative conception of "enlightenment." It is a biopolitics because the central aim is to interrogate the conditions of life itself, how and in what sense one lives and desires. The militancy of this project comes not only from its fearless engagement with the larger society but also from its collectivity: it must be done collectively rather than coming from an expert, as with biopower. Hardt concludes his essay by giving an example of 'militant research': the displaced workers movement in Argentina (MTD) (Hardt 2011: 33-34). Though he does not provide a detailed explanation as to why the MTD demonstrates such a politics, others have pointed out that the new MTD worker owners in hundreds of recovered factories had to develop new capacities to manage work-spaces collectively. Likewise, many of the workers in these factories learned from one another how to build alliances with the broader to community to defend these expropriated spaces against repossession (see e.g. Byrne and Healy 2006; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006; Cameron, Gibson-Graham and Healy 2013). As Lewis and Klein (2004) demonstrate in their documentary *The Take,* learning how to build a really "new economy" from the ruins of an old one meant exploring uncharted territories, learning through experimentation and doing, and sharing the results with others. The ongoing efforts in Argentina's recovered factory movement is just one example of what Callon and Rabeharisoa refer to as "researchers in the wild" engaging in a militant biopolitics where learning together—research and experimentation—becomes part of a process of taking life itself as an object (2003: 193). In the section that follows I describe how the Community Economies Collective has, over the past two decades, been involved with efforts in the sorts of militant biopolitical research that Hardt calls for.

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[2] One implication of Hardt's analysis would appear to be that the "enlightenment"—from Kant to David Harvey—has never delivered on its promise of universal emancipation and that expert-rule, in different forms, seems to be a historical constant. However, as I discuss in the sections that follow, Hardt's use of the cynics suggest that there have been intellectual traditions that allow for collective exit from the minority through collective intellectual engagement and practice. Hardt (2010), with the help of Foucault, identifies the cynics of ancient Greece as one intellectual tradition. Likewise, Agamben's (2011) recent engagement with monastic traditions, particularly the Franciscan tradition, follows a similar line of reasoning where the aim of monasticism was not a cloistering of the subject behind the rule of law but a suffusing of sacred habit and devotional practice as a means to collective joy. This would suggest that "enlightenment" is not to be associated with a particular moment in history but rather a collective approach to thought and action.

Collective enlightenment and economic difference

Gibson-Graham (2006) and the CEC replace a capitalocentric conception of the economic landscape with one that highlights economic difference in all dimensions of economic activity. Drawing on Marxian, heterodox and feminist economic theory, and insights from economic geography, sociology, political science and anthropology this representation of economic difference seeks to replace the political project of critique with one that rests upon regarding the economy as a space of economic possibility and ethical action. What is striking about this representation of economic difference from the perspective we have adopted here is that everyday economic actors, operating in a collective setting, have the potential to demonstrate expertise and a capacity for action in relation to their economic lives. This stands in stark contrast to the dominant conception of economy where only trained expert-administrators are imagined to be sufficiently knowledgeable to govern economic spaces.

Dominant conceptions of economy, at work in both academic and popular discourse, represent the economy as a space composed of capitalist firms that employ wage labor in the production of goods and services for local, regional and international markets. The state may play a greater or lesser role in economies but private enterprise is seen to be the mainstay of economic life and for profit financial institutions are understood as the primary source of investment that dictates the trajectory of economies at all scales.

Informed by insights from feminist economists, the starting place of the CEC is to point out that if the economy is regarded as a space where goods and services are produced, circulated and consumed, all societies, rich and poor, have considerable economic activity operating in the household and community sphere, outside the marketplace. To this central insight from feminist theory Gibson-Graham add other dimensions of difference, frequently using the Diverse Economy Diagram to represent a more fully diversified economic space (Figure 1).

This representational strategy of regarding the economy as a space of difference simply attempts to enumerate the spaces, relationships and practices of a diverse economy, initially without interpreting them through a normative framework. For example, Gibson-Graham (1996) have pointed out for a long time that it is possible to use the Marxian theory of surplus value to identify diverse forms of enterprises and households—differentiated by what they refer to, following Resnick and Wolff (1987), as class process. If productive class processes are understood as marked by differences in who produces surplus value (and under what conditions), how that surplus value is appropriated (and by whom), and who is in a position to make decisions about the distribution of surplus then many societies contain class processes *other* than capitalism. For example, in the United States it is possible to find contemporary instances of slavery where an entity owns both the means of production and effectively owns the bodies that are engaged in the productive activity. These bodies are kept alive by the state, but the state, or the managers it designates, is in a position to decide what to do with the surplus that is generated as well as control the conditions under which the enslaved bodies work and how much they are supported directly or indirectly. It is easy to see prison work by the two million people currently incarcerated as a form of slavery but it is also possible to regard the million or so bodies that "volunteer" to become members of the US military as slaves, if only for a number of years.

Likewise, it is also possible to see instances of feudalism in the contemporary landscape in households (e.g. Cameron 2000) or even in graduate school where work-life is structured around obligate relations. If it is possible to see multiple forms of exploitative class processes existing in the contemporary landscape, it also becomes possible to see non-exploitative, non-capitalist processes as well. Self-employed people work by the tens of millions in both minority and majority world countries. Likewise, though few in number, worker owned cooperatives exist in supposedly "capitalist" countries like the United States, though their number would greatly increase were one to consider simple partnerships in doctor's practices, law firms, and many other trades where surplus is collectively produced and appropriated.

ENTERPRISE	LABOR	PROPERTY	TRANSACTIONS	FINANCE
CAPITALIST	WAGE	PRIVATE	MARKET	MAINSTREAM MARKET
ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST State owned Environmentally responsible Socially Responsible Non-profit	ALTERNATIVE PAID Self-employed Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for Welfare	ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE Publicly accessible privately own property State managed assets Customary (clan) land Community Land trusts Indigenous Knowledge	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Fair Trade Alternative Currencies Underground Market Barter	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Cooperative Banks Credit Unions Community-based Financial Institutions Micro-Finance
NON-CAPITALIST Worker cooperatives Sole proprietorships Community enterprise Feudal Slave	UNPAID Housework Volunteer Self-provisioning Slave labor	OPEN ACCESS Atmosphere International Waters Open source IP	NON-MARKET Household sharing Gift giving Gleaning Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, piracy, poaching	NON-MARKET Sweat equity Family lending Donations Interest-free loans

Figure 1: Diverse Economy diagram (based on Cameron, Gibson-Graham and Healy 2013).

There are a number of ways in which the use of feminist, Marxian and heterodox economics to differentiate economic landscapes departs from the project of criticizing capitalism. In place of demonstrating how "capitalism" structures society, subsuming culture, politics and ideology to the task of its reproduction, we instead describe how elements of a diverse economy might be articulated with one another in order to effect new developments and transformations. For example, how might credit unions and non-profits enable the formation of community based enterprises? As I detail in the next section, the CEC asks these sorts of questions and, in researching them with other community members through activist research projects they are engaged in the collective research Hardt calls for. In this way, the economy itself is repositioned: no longer the object of expert knowledge, it becomes something that we collectively constitute through different ways of knowing and doing, indeed it becomes something we can "take back" through a militant biopolitics.

3. Research as biopolitics

> We have worked with community researchers drawn from all walks of life as well as NGOs, government agencies, small businesses, academic researchers and students in a variety of locations in the USA, Australia and the Philippines (Gibson-Graham 2006)… In all our research conversations the economy, rather than being "out there" in the stock markets and corporate headquarters of global cities, has been 'domesticated', brought down to size and made visible as a site of everyday activities and familiar institutions. (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010: 329)

Many members of the CEC have been involved in action research projects, conceived in a variety of ways and using diverse techniques, but all with an intention of changing the world, *with others*, through an attempt to understand it. In this spirit, the CEC's work can be seen as a small part of a larger social movement beginning with multiple global and US social forums and continuing with emergent Occupy, social and 'solidarity economy' movements. Beginning with action research projects to envision post-capitalist economic development in the deindustrialized spaces of the Pioneer Valley in the United States (CEC 2001) and the Latrobe Valley in Victoria, Australia (both projects were funded by national government agencies), CEC members have produced a wide array of community action projects. Cameron and Gordon (2010), and Harris (2009) have all studied and *participated in* the formation of alternative food systems, considering the process by which alternative approaches to land tenure, gift giving, generosity, trust, marketing schemes and sharing the harvest produce a food system that both embodies and creates a different sense of place and community. St. Martin (e.g. 2001, 2006) has focused on communities of fishers in the Northeastern United States to both understand and more effectively manage fishery resources. Barron (forthcoming) has directed similar research efforts towards understanding common knowledge and use of mushroom species along the US eastern seaboard. Healy (2011), Cornwell (2011) and Cameron (2010) chart the ways worker ownership, community and social enterprises allow for different approaches to economic development. Gibson and CEC (2009), Healy and Graham (2008), and Graham and Cornwell (2009) have explored the ways in which various alternative economic institutions and practices can be used to constitute different regional economies in both minority and majority world countries.

While all of these projects have been directed at different concerns using different techniques to promote community involvement, they share three commonalities in their engagement with economies and environments. First, these projects depart from the usual agenda of critical scholarship in the sense that they are attempts to produce and inhabit other worlds in collaboration with community researchers. Second, one consequence of this collaboration is that the research agenda, its attendant surprises and discoveries, are shaped by these interactions. St. Martin, for example, describes how the processes of engaged research with fisher communities engendered a deeper appreciation of their knowledge of local fisheries and the potential for community based approaches to its stewardship—an outcome that might have been hoped for but was by no means guaranteed.[3] Likewise, Gibson and CEC (2009) describe multiple attempts at starting community based enterprises in the Philippines using remittance income from migrant workers. CEC members worked closely with various individuals and groups—a woman entrepreneur who started a rice center, a group of elderly women who started a food cooperative, a group of porters who wished to start a trucking cooperative. Some of these businesses succeeded and some of them failed but all of these initiatives were premised on the idea that it is possible to create successful communal/non-capitalist enterprises.

This brings us to the third commonality in relation to all of these projects—they take post-capitalism as their starting point in at least two distinct senses. First, while many of these projects are interested in the process of development none of them are guided by the presumption that resisting, accommodating or enabling capitalism is necessary. Instead, it becomes possible to use community engaged research to produce non-capitalisms in a robust sense: worker-cooperatives and other communal enterprises to be sure, but also collective systems for distribution (CSAs, CFS), communal approaches to resource management, community based mechanisms for investment, etc. Second, these developments are postcapitalist in the sense that the research process, economic knowledge and know-how is not imagined to be concentrated in the hands of an entrepreneurial or expert few, but distributed amongst the many.

Community-based research initiatives are understood as a collective effort to "exit the minority" with respect to understanding and making decisions about economic lives, including its ecological dimensions. For some of us in the CEC the question has become: are there are other ways of co-producing knowledge about our economic lives that go beyond the scale of community based research initiatives? These community-based research initiatives, and others like them, are in my view a kind of prefigurative biopolitics that could be carried out with more people, on a larger scale and with greater effect. This is perhaps one way of thinking about the attempts by Brazil's solidarity economy participants to map entities—both for-profit and not-for-profit—that prioritize social and ecological aims in the context of "worker" self-management, broadly defined. This mapping initiative enjoys support from the Brazilian State and one of the project's guiding ambitions is to facilitate mutual aid practices and supply chain formation amongst the solidarity economy membership (currently 3 million in Brazil) (Borowiak 2010).

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[3] One of the fisher communities that St. Martin engaged in Port Clyde, Maine, later created the first Community Supported Fisheries (CSF), modeled after CSAs (St. Martin, personal communication).

4. Conclusion

In the preceding section I have outlined how the work of my CEC colleagues represents, in my view, a practice of activist scholarship that moves beyond the critical project and attempts to engage in the production of new ways of understanding and being the world, which is to say new ways of organizing economies, our interactions with others, and with ecologies. This approach to scholarship frequently involves us in working with others in collaborative understanding and, in this way it eschews the production of expert knowledge. In one sense there is nothing new in this engagement with what Lee (2006) refers to as "ordinary economies." As Cameron and Gibson-Graham (2003) acknowledge many traditions with feminist scholarship, economic geography, anthropology and sociology have long understood the economy to be a much broader and potentially more inclusive terrain than the one that is represented in conventional economic theory and in the representations of its critics. What I think is different for any scholar wishing to engage with crucial economic and ecological matters of concern is the present context. Certainly, as our critically minded colleagues remind us—the present post-Global Financial Crisis environment has seen a remarkably uneven recovery, where powerful forces have allowed for staggering concentrations of wealth for a very few and ever-increasing precarity for the rest. Casting a shadow over a sputtering economic recovery is the real specter of a return to "normal" economic growth and its consequences for the planet. Critical awareness is a good beginning but only a beginning. If critical scholarship cannot identify the next step, if it remains stuck in a process of articulating an ever more accurate description of our situation, if the only hope it offers is some millennial moment where a force big enough to confront "capitalism" or ecological crisis emerges, than at a certain point we must conclude that critical scholarship has become complicit with keeping things as they are.

The alternative, in my view, is something akin to a militant biopolitics of research into new ways of organizing our economies, our interactions with one another, and our engagements with the more than human world (Cameron, Gibson-Graham and Healy 2013). For scholars and researchers, the process of moving beyond critique means either playing along with the present process of using our "expert" knowledge for the benefit of a few (including ourselves), or working alongside others in the process of producing another world.

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