**Toward an Ontological Politics of Collaborative Entanglement: Teaching and Learning as Methods Assemblage**

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On a sunny Saturday in April 2018 I arrived in Boston along with eigh- teen students, after a two-hour van ride from Amherst. We were there to participate in a series of community workshops hosted by the Center for Economic Democracy (CED) and the Boston Solidarity Economy Initiative (SEI), a convening group of seven base-building community organizing groups who are coordinating efforts to theorize, discuss, and build socially just, sustainable, and cooperative economies.

Our participation was part of a semester-long course, Building Solidarity Economies. The course combines elements of community service learning, community-based participatory research, and activist anthropology to help understand better, participate in, and support growing efforts in Massachusetts to advance ethical and cooperative economic experiments, relationships, and practices. We learned from and worked with a range of organizations and enterprises—including SEI. We went on site visits, participated in workshops, hosted guest speakers, conducted interviews, worked on an ongoing mapping project, and created community profiles for organizations to make use of. We read about different solidarity economy efforts and histories, discussed and developed theory, and engaged in multiple levels of oral and written structured reflection.

This trip to Boston was one of the culminating events of the course.

From a downtown parking garage we walked a few blocks east, past the state capitol on Beacon Street, and headed into the Boston Common. The park was teaming with midday activity—parents strolling with their babies, kids running across walkways, lines forming by food trucks and snaking out of the visitor center, and locals cutting through the park. The bustling commerce and playful families and friends in and around the well-maintained public park gave a sense of well-being and community that belied the deep histories of gentrification and displacement, entrenched inequalities, and consolidation of wealth and power in Boston. Boston ranks seventh nationally in income inequality (Berube 2018), black workers are twice as likely as white workers to be unemployed, and while black households have an average net worth of $8, the net worth of white households is $247,500 (Ballesteros 2017).

We found a relatively empty area and got settled to eat lunch while sharing our recent thoughts about the constraints and openings for solidarity economy politics—for the proliferation of institutions, practices, and relationships that might help to advance a politics around the very nature of economy. As usual, the reflections and conversation brought forward interesting and thoughtful insights. Echoing the position of SEI, some students talked about the importance of centering the needs, interests, and leadership of front line communities if “other economies” were to have a chance of challenging or supplanting capitalist logics and relations. Other students talked about the importance of language. They talked about whether and how academic language and theory were or could be useful for “community” projects and movements; they discussed whether the term solidarity economy should be used to describe the efforts of communities and movements (and who gets to decide), and they explained how solidarity economy frameworks might be able to highlight and amplify unseen possibilities, on the one hand, or, on the other hand, unwittingly exclude or obscure important, already existing cultural prac- tices. Still others discussed how they felt both inspired and encouraged by a fuller understanding that non-capitalist, ethical economies were happening all around them. They were also circumspect. There were many questions about how solidarity economy efforts could take hold and advance beyond localized projects. It was a great, energizing discussion.

After lunch we walked a few blocks on cobblestone streets to the workshops held in a large community space on the edge of downtown. We were among the first to arrive. We signed in and then self-organized along with Boston-based activists and organizers, leaders, and other community members into different workshops, including worker cooperatives 101, community land trusts and alternative housing, divest- reinvest projects, and healing and care-work. These conversations were followed by a community dinner that brought in an expanded audience—well into the hundreds—to hear and participate in a panel discussion focused on organizing a solidarity economy in Boston, the panel featuring three longstanding community leaders as well as activist and scholar Kali Akuno, one of the primary organizers of Cooperation Jackson (https://cooperationjackson.org/).

The evening was electric. The level of planning and organization, the clear analysis of the panelists and workshop leaders, and the high turnout and enthusiasm from the community base demonstrated and revealed some of the growing architecture for solidarity economy politics in Massachusetts.

After the event, and feeling inspired, we drove home through the night. During the drive, I reflected on the evening, the overall semester, and the class’s role in the overarching political project. I felt encouraged and hopeful, but also a bit ambivalent. I wondered how, and the extent to which, students were being transformed and further transforming them- selves in relation to the work. It was pretty clear—as Gabriela, a graduate student joining us for the trip, had reflected back to me after our lunch- time conversations—that students not only displayed a strong, critical analysis of capitalism, but they were developing their own sophisticated understandings of “alternative” economies. This was good. However, my aim in this class—as part of a broader politics—was not simply to help students develop a better understanding of economy but to help strength- en and enact solidarity economy politics. I wondered to what extent the course had helped further cultivate desires and interests toward deepen- ing students’ participation in other economies and other worlds?

Even more, I was not sure if it made sense to think about my pedagogical efforts fundamentally in terms of the success of individual students and their individualized growth and development. I care deeply about the well-being of students in my classes. But I very much wanted to avoid reducing and mapping my teaching and learning objectives onto the liberal project of envisioning the world as made up of individual, rational actors who make their own individual choices based on self-interest— constitutive subjects of the dominant reality of capitalist modernity (see Sandler’s essay and the introduction in this issue). This was a reality that solidarity economy politics was resisting and rejecting. And well-being for students in my class and indeed all life on earth depends on the resilience, emergence, and expansion of economies and worlds not circumscribed by capitalist modernity (Escobar 2018; Klein 2020; Moore and Patel 2018; Tsing 2015).

For the better part of a decade I have been working alongside, learning from, and participating in an emerging solidarity economy—projects and initiatives aimed at creating just, ethical, cooperative economies and relations. I work on committees, participate in events and actions, help to organize community meetings, and serve on boards and in working groups. In my research and writing I adopt a largely dialogical, activist approach (Hale 2001;, Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003; Shear and Lyon-Callo 2013), navigating shared (partially shared) political and epistemological space as well as common commitments. I aim to understand better the conditions we are immersed in and responding to through efforts to create shared well-being. More fundamentally, my stance is largely performative (Burke and Shear 2014; Gibson-Graham 2008; Roelvink et al. 2015; Lyon, this issue). Any efforts to critique and uncover, or know and discover, are subsumed within and in the service of a larger project of helping to support, collaborate around, and bring into being what is hidden, suppressed, or deemed impossible in relation to the dominant social order. My aim is to help advance the work.

Following this approach, a better evaluative question might be—how and to what extent was this class entangled into solidarity economy politics in generative ways? And to turn this evaluative query into a provocation: how might I understand and move the class—and indeed all of the academic and university materials and relations I am assembled into and that are in part at my disposal—toward helping to forge more connections, create more entanglements, and extend more resources to solidarity economy efforts? In what ways can I help to reveal and create openings, pathways toward, and connections for students to envision themselves as part of and transform themselves in relation to solidarity economy—a movement that aims to advance, extend, and defend economies and worlds that privilege the well-being of people and planet over profit?

What follows is an effort to help think through and theorize the efforts in which I am involved, including most prominently the Building Solidarity Economies course briefly discussed earlier, to help support the advancement of a politics of becoming (Biehl and Locke 2017; Gibson- Graham et al. 2001; Miller 2019), a politics that aims to create the conditions for the emergence, actualization, and durability of other selves and other worlds.

In the first section I discuss some of the contemporary conditions at the university (and beyond) that students are encountering, being trans- formed by, and increasingly rejecting. I emphasize the potential for students (and others) to envision and begin to invest themselves in a politics of becoming through participating in projects that can transgress and exceed the epistemological and ontological limits of what is deemed to be possible (and see Shear 2017) and offer “new” and suppressed ways of being.

In the next section I discuss solidarity economy movement and politics, focusing on its emergence and transformative potential in Massachusetts. I position solidarity economy as a potential “transition discourse” (Escobar 2018, 138–52, and see Shear 2020) that reveals, contributes to, and enables access to material and semiotic elements that can enable communities—borrowing a phrase from Paulo Freire— to “make and remake themselves” (2004, 15) outside the dictates of patriarchal capitalist modernity.

With this framework in place I then turn to my own efforts to help support and amplify a growing solidarity economy movement in Massachusetts through multifaceted collaborations within and between community groups, networks, and the broader emerging assemblage. Reflecting on community engaged classes, collaborative research, internships, and independent studies that I have set in motion at the University of Massachusetts Amherst—and drawing from interviews with students who participated in these efforts—I theorize teaching, learning, and research as a form of ontological politics. I rethink engaged academic practice, from an effort to know critically, understand, and intervene in the world to contributing to what John Law describes as a “methods assemblage”—a de-centered and collaborative collection of techniques, practices, relations, and resources that work to organize and condense a given reality.

*Teaching and Learning at the End of the (One World) World*

As discussed in the introduction to this issue, young people including undergraduate students in US universities are increasingly experiencing traumatic, physiological impacts of a world that is losing coherence, leading to anxiety, depression, loneliness, and despair. This is not only because of the empirical conditions students are encountering but also because of the discordance between those conditions and the narratives they have been told their whole lives about how to act and who to be in the world.

On the one hand, capitalist relations and mutually constitutive systems of oppression are producing massive social inequalities, social injustice, and violence of all kinds as well as a narrowing of expectations about future quality of life. Students and families are accruing overwhelming, life-constraining debt for a chance to compete against each other in an increasingly insufficient labor market, while wealth consolidates into fewer and fewer hands. Growing public discourse since the 2008 economic crisis—including discourses brought about by movements like Occupy, Black Lives Matter, the Fight for 15, and so on—are joined with the now seemingly daily occurrence of some sort of new report or story signaling impending ecological catastrophe and existential crisis: ocean acidification that is dissolving ocean life, catastrophic weather events, disappearing insects, plastics filling the stomachs of beached whales and the digestive tracks of tiny amphipods, depleting oxygen levels in the ocean, and of course rapidly rising temperatures that are melting and burning the world from under us. The conditions of life under which students are learning are precarious, and prospects for future individual and social well-being seem bleak.

At the same time these conditions come into conflict with the dominant stories that students have been told about how to make sense of themselves, how to be happy, and how to do well in the world through individual responsibility, hard work, and rational decision making (see introduction to this issue). At the university, circulating neoliberal and liberal narratives about what education is for follow and further these contradictions.

For example, at UMass Amherst, where I teach and work—just like at many universities—students are taught to understand themselves as consumers of education and are encouraged to experience their bodies as skill-building, entrepreneurial “ability machines” (Foucault 2008, 226–33) that should be honed and invested in, in order to succeed in a rapidly changing high stakes world (Shear and Zontine 2017, 111). Students simply need to take the right courses, and choose the right experiences beyond the classroom from a panoply of “opportunities” that can then help them to gain and acquire skills to compete in the market, and become good citizens and happy people. At the same time students are told the choices are up to them, that anything is possible—that they need to discover and follow their passions, and do meaningful work in the world.

For many students, neither investment in rational self-interest, nor a bourgeois understanding of the world as an open horizon for finding personal meaning makes much sense in light of contemporary conditions that are unwinding and unraveling long-held cultural truths. Indeed, the benefits of economic growth and the very notion of societal progress appear as radically discordant stories and inadequate actions in the face of a world in which eight people own as much wealth as the bottom half of the world’s population, and ecological collapse is immanent. It is no wonder that 61 percent of undergraduate students in the US reported in 2017 that they experience “overwhelming anxiety” (Reilly 2018). The suicide rate among young adults aged 15–24 has tripled since the 1950s (Burrell 2019), and according to the National Data on Campus Suicide and Depression, about 1 in 12 college students has made a suicide plan at some point.

To put this another way, students—like many of us—feel and know deeply in their bodies that there is something terribly and fundamentally wrong with the reality that they are in, that it is losing coherence and meaning; and the narratives that offered a sense of individual and societal purpose are unable to provide psychic and somatic relief from a precarious world.

From a Gramscian perspective, this embodied refusal is not only symptomatic of cultural contradiction and crisis but presents an opportunity. As Brian Burke and I posit elsewhere:

Today’s crises therefore present opportunities to move beyond the conventional “solutions” of coping and accommodating, managing and adapting, resisting and reforming. They create space for social and economic experimentation, new political alliances, new cultural narratives, and alternative social and socio-ecological relations. In short, these crises may give rise to new modes of being in the world that can move us toward a more sustainable and egalitarian future. But how are these new modes of being created and how can activist scholars engage with and support them?” (Burke and Shear 2014: 129)

To help advance this work of cultivation and creation, what might be needed is a shift in orientation toward research, teaching, and other forms of politics; a shift that resonates with an insight by Adolfo Albán: “the existential problem that confronts us today is not a lack of knowledge, but of the conditions of existence” (cited in Escobar 2018, 33). Indeed, in the era of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene/Plantationocene (Haraway 2015; Moore 2016; Tsing 2015) the evidence is incontrovertible and overwhelming that business as usual cannot go on, that human activity—or at least the dominant mode of life—is undermining its own conditions of possibility. More studies, more critique, more expert knowledge about why this is happening will not save us. Continuing our mode of life but in a gentler, more socially just, eco-friendly way will not save us. In this moment a politics aimed at teaching students and other publics simply to know and understand and critique the world seems both insufficient and misguided. I am interested in an approach that is more about helping students—and in dialogue with my students, having them help me—imagine and more fully realize ourselves as otherwise, as part of other emerging worlds that are not circumscribed or dominated by capitalist modernity, and that might help them and us learn to survive well, or at least survive.

One helpful way to think about engaging in a politics of becoming other is in relation to design theory. In Designs for the Pluriverse Escobar (2018) argues that we should understand design as a form of ontological politics, a politics of creating (or maintaining) worlds. Tools and technology, city planning, international development policies, narratives, architecture, and other design projects big and small, work on and through us, producing and delimiting and enabling who we are, what we can think and do, what we can imagine and desire. And Escobar tells us we should be wary. Design projects—academic and otherwise—largely function as political technologies of patriarchal capitalist modernity, the aim of which is to develop and remake difference into a singular, One World World (OWW) (Law 2011) that colonizes and incorporates—or excludes and erases—ontological difference. To put this another way, we are designed by expert knowledge that sets the discursive parameters for the types of objects that we might encounter, the subjects that we might hope to become, and the design futures we might wish to put into practice. A politics of becoming other, then, must concern itself with how design can create conditions of antagonism, evasion, and escape from the OWW. It prompts us to consider how communities are already and might yet be becoming more powerful, determinative designers of our or their own futures? And prompts us to ask: how can scholars and students learn from, defend, and help cultivate the conditions from which communities are able collectively to remake themselves or ourselves?

In the following section I discuss the movement and framework of solidarity economy, a design project that can enable communities to engage in a politics of creating the conditions for the cultivation and expansion other economies and other worlds.

*Solidarity Economy and Transition Movements*

Solidarity economy (SE) can be understood as an effort to redesign the way that people and non-human others live together, interact with, and make each other through contesting and reworking the nature of economy. SE is still relatively new to the United States but has a much longer history in Latin America and Europe. It is also a movement and framework that is widespread, with efforts on every continent. One of the core principles and characteristics of SE is its pluralism, and the nature of SE is in some ways relatively unsettled and in process; SE is envisioned, described, and organized around in different ways. It can mean formal and informal political projects, it signals both reform and revolution, it refers to movements and organizations that self-consciously describe themselves in terms of solidarity economy, and it is a term that is used to refer to projects that have SE characteristics but do not identify as such. And SE is envisioned on multiple scales. SE is rooted in com- munity needs and knowledge but aspires toward translocal networks. SE is organized in very different ways and can include local, regional, state-level, and global initiatives (Akuno 2017; Allard et al. 2008; Amin 2009; Borowiak et al. 2018; Healy et al. 2018; Kawano 2018; Laville 2010; Loh and Shear 2015; Loh and Jimenez 2017; Matthaei 2018; Miller 2006;

Safri 2015; Utting 2015).

Foundational to SE is an understanding of economy as composed of economic difference; capitalism might be dominant, but it is not the only game in town. SE seeks to make visible, support, create, organize around and link up non-capitalist relations that can help put “people and planet over profit.” Supplanting the figure of Homo economicus—the self- interested, competitive rational actor who inhabits and makes market capitalism—is Homo solidaricus (Kawano 2018), who operates through and in relation to ethical and cooperative rationalities, values, and ways of being that are encouraged and enabled through non-capitalist insti- tutions and relations including cooperatives of all types, commons and community land trusts, alternative currencies and time banks, coop- erative finance and participatory budgeting, mutual aid networks, and permaculture. These practices and institutions acknowledge interdependence, can center care and community, and privilege resilience and co- operation over competition and profit-seeking.

Excitingly, the advancing solidarity economy politics in Massachusetts is intermingling with social justice movements, and it is increasingly being developed in dialogue with and being led by base-building community organizations. Loh and Jimenez (2017), for example, position alternative and cooperative economic practices as a dimension of a tripartite model of transformation that also includes shifting consciousness and building power in front-line communities, both to meet immediate needs and to work toward systemic transformations as part of a politics of becoming other.

Solidarity Economy is more than just cooperatives and other alterna- tive economic institutions. We view solidarity economy holistically as a social justice movement. Like other movements, it is shifting our consciousness not only to uncover the root causes and what is wrong, but also to inspire dreams of the world as it should be. It is building

power, not just to resist and reform the injustices and unsustainabil- ities produced by current systems, but ultimately to democratically control and govern political and economic resources to sustain people and planet. And it is creating economic alternatives and prototypes for producing, exchanging, consuming, and investing in ways that are more just, sustainable, and democratic. (Loh and Jimenez 2016, 6, bold in the original)

I give two quick examples here of initiatives coming together in Massachusetts that are themselves in different stages of becoming— Wellspring Cooperatives in Springfield and the Boston Ujima Project. Wellspring is inspired by both the giant networked cooperative community Mondragon, in Spain, and the anchor institution model put forward by Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Ohio, that creates a captured market by leveraging the purchasing power of hospitals, government buildings, and other institutions that are ideologically and materially “anchored” in place. Through co-op conversions, co-op academies, anchor institution strategies, and a broadening community ecosystem, Wellspring is working to build community wealth in low- income, front-line communities in Springfield. Currently there are four co-ops, including a re-upholstery co-op, an all-women window restoration business, and an industrial-scale hydroponic greenhouse. The basic organization is that the nonprofit Wellspring provides support, training, and research for the co-ops and potential co-ops. And a potential opportunity is that as the network develops, part of the surplus might be used to seed the creation of more worker cooperatives.

Beyond the operative mechanics of cooperative development, Wellspring holds the radical potential for a politics of becoming. The board of the nonprofit holds the most seats for worker-owners, but it also includes representation for community development, community organizing groups, labor, and individual community members as well as anchor institutions. As the cooperatives develop, the needs and interests of varying community members and institutions are revealed and can be negotiated in a shared, democratic process as the network builds economic power. The radical potential here is for worker-owners to organize around, enact, and transform through non-capitalist space that can help shift practices, consciousness, and desires (Cornwell 2011). As worker-owners—and at the level of Wellspring governance, other community members—engage in ethical, collectively negotiated decision-making practices, particularly around world-making surplus, they can begin to form different understandings of themselves and their relationship to one another beyond individual rational self-interest (Byrne and Healy 2006; Cornwell 2011).

Another example is the Boston Ujima Project, a multifaceted initiative led by and for working-class, front-line communities of color. Publicly launched in 2017, Ujima—a Kwanzaa principle meaning collective work and responsibility—has gained notoriety as an innovative and powerful instantiation of solidarity economy. Ujima assembles an array of non- capitalist, alternative, and community-based institutions and practices in order to build grassroots power and shift imagination, desires, and re- lationships toward a community-controlled economy. Integral to Ujima’s ecosystem is a capital fund that reworks the way that philanthropic giving and capital investment influence the structures and logics of decision making in community development and governance. The capital fund is democratically controlled by Ujima members, who collectively decide how to run it and what to invest in that can support and build the type of community that they want.

As I summarize elsewhere,

“Grants, donations, and investment dollars from both inside and out- side of the organization are pooled together in a fund democratically controlled by Ujima members. Assemblies meet together to discuss and determine community needs and wants and democratically de- cide how to invest their shared capital in development proposals. Member assemblies are joined with a host of other relationship build- ing, consciousness raising/changing efforts “in which members learn, connect, and cooperate together” (Jimenez 2018: 2). Assemblies also create community standards to determine the types of enterprises that they want to grow and support; enterprises that meet those standards comprise a good business directory that will then be further supported by a digital local currency and a time bank, and are eligible for support from the capital fund and Ujima support services.” (Shear 2020, 132)

Non-capitalist and cooperative relationships and practices converge with public education and consciousness raising efforts and work to build power in and through the organization. As Loh and Jimenez (2017, 31) describe, building power “within Boston’s low income communities of color is both strategy and outcome for Ujima.” Ujima cultivates community power through popular assemblies and other collective activities and builds economic and political power as the organization grows. Ujima builds power to address the impacts of systems of oppression and gain material and ideological control over their conditions of possibility.

Wellspring and Ujima are very different organizations that face dif- ferent challenges and constraints (Loh and Jimenez 2017). Yet these two very different instantiations of solidarity economy are in dialogue and working relationship with each other and numerous other initiatives and efforts. Indeed, the growth of solidarity economy movement and practice in Massachusetts over the past decade has been really remarkable, with centers in Worcester, Springfield, and Boston and with solidarity economy–type efforts in communities, organizations, and academic in- stitutions in all parts of the state (Loh and Jimenez 2017; Loh and Shear 2015) that are converging and critically engaging with one another. Over the past few years a formalized, statewide network has assembled and is convening meetings and working groups for sharing ideas, learning from each other, and organizing in relation to a strategy of “fight and build”—fight against oppression and exploitation and build economies and communities rooted in collective well-being rather than extraction, exploitation, and competition. The statewide network is building power and experimenting, thickening connections among organizational members, opening previously unseen or suppressed ways of relating to each other through economy and beyond, and actively designing projects that operate through cooperation, interdependence, and collective well-being. Solidarity economy has the potential to undermine the coherence of the One World World, by proliferating post-capitalist narratives, bring- ing non-capitalist social and economic forms into being, and instilling, advancing, and defending collective and ethical ways of being, doing, and relating to each other—an assembling reality that might betray a

capitalist order.

*Teaching and Learning as Collaborative Entanglement*

As a diverse range of scholars have argued, reality cannot be understood as a singular, predetermined domain, existing somewhere out there, but must be actively composed and produced. Reality and realities are in a continual process of becoming. Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we can understand realities as constantly being made and

remade through the articulation of various elements into a seemingly coherent whole—an assemblage. Assemblages are always in motion and subject to unraveling and reworking, and contraction and expansion. Assemblages gain provisional coherence and provisional stability as they pull together (and are pulled by) heterogeneous elements—material and semiotic, techniques and practices, individual bodies and communities. As Miller explains, “some assemblages are more durable than others, and some are also more potent in their ability to articulate myriad beings and relations into webs of mutual influence and interdependence that come to seem eternal or inevitable” (Miller 2019, 20–21). However, even hegemonic assemblages, like capitalism, are always in the process of coming undone and being remade and reconstituted. Subjects who are in a process of constituting and constituted by an assemblage—in other words, subjects who are in a process of becoming—threaten to escape rearticulation into an assemblage through “lines of flight”— meanings, desires, urges, truths, ways of being that exceed or cannot be made sense of by the assemblage. However, as Miller again explains, “lines of flight are not headed on any particular trajectory” (88). Thus change, transformation, or otherness is always uncertain and always unclear.

Part of my politics, then, is providing a bit of a container—a bit of a push—for transformation; a line of connection toward (an) other assemblage. For many of my students, whose very bodies are rejecting the he- gemonic assemblage of capitalism—and whose dispositions, knowledges, dreams, and desires are increasingly inadequately accounted for within the One World World—I am attempting to offer potential trajectories and conveyors toward an assembling reality of solidarity economy that can help them continue a process of becoming other. And as the assemblage of solidarity economy expands, and is able to incorporate more elements, and more difference, it offers more articulation points for subjects, ideas, and materials to gather onto and cohere.

Jon Law’s rethinking of methods (2004) can help us to theorize further how teaching and learning might be incorporated into an assemblage politics. For Law, methods that we use to engage with the world do not simply work to apprehend, uncover, or critique an existing reality; they also help to “amplify” and “condense” a reality or realities. Methods are performative. They work to bring into being and strengthen what they aim to describe. Or, as Law puts it, methods and methods assemblages are a “combination of reality detector[s] and reality amplifier[s]” (14). Methods, then, are never “innocent or purely technical” (143). They are instead implicated in advancing particular patterns, sets of relations, and both longstanding durable and emerging realities. From this perspective the fundamental aim of research and teaching, is not primarily to produce better, more efficient, more precise methods to discover or critique the reality of what exists and how things are working out there, but rather “the issue becomes how to make things different, and what to make” (143).

Law suggests embracing this performative stance through what he describes as a methods assemblage—more or less intentionally bringing forward practices, techniques, resources, and relations that can organize particular realities. So, in my work at UMass, I am trying as much as possible to entangle myself and assemble all of my academic projects into solidarity economy movements to help bring forward, support, and advance this growing reality as well as to create possible trajectories for students, and myself, to further realize ourselves and the world in new ways in relation to it. Toward this end I have mobilized research opportunities and independent studies; structured, funded, and credited internships; collaborative writing projects; and a set of two-interlinked courses: Other Economies Are Possible, and Building Solidarity Economies. As the following descriptions suggest, these courses combine elements of community service learning and community-based participatory research, but are more simply aimed at strengthening the work of solidarity economy projects, and creating lines of connection for students to envision and realize themselves in new ways by escaping the dictates of capitalist modernity.

In the first year that I taught these courses we collaborated with two different initiatives, one in Boston and one out of western Massachusetts. These collaborations emerged from deep connections and relationships that were established as part of activist research over the previous decade, working with community groups building intentional ethical initiatives (Shear 2014). A year before the class started we began to have meetings about what might make sense for the organizations and the overall movement. We wanted, on the one hand, to figure out how to do work that could contribute to the efforts that they/we were are a part of—strengthening the organizations, participating in projects, expanding the discourse, deepening relationships, supporting conversations and strategy, bringing resources, and so on. On the other hand, I wanted at the same time, to cultivate and support processes of economic becoming in and for my students; to help them see, feel, further desire, and begin to actualize other ways of being in the world.

After numerous conversations we figured out two projects that we thought might work. For the western Massachusetts network that involved the Wellspring cooperatives mentioned earlier in this essay, and which is integrated into the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network, we created a project that began with a tour and conversations with Wellspring worker-owners, followed by a presentation and discussion about solidarity economy with the director of Wellspring. We then, over the course of the semester, interviewed eight worker cooperatives in western Massachusetts as part of an effort intended to help produce a report around the state of worker cooperatives. For the Boston network that included the Center for Economic Democracy (CED) and the Boston Solidarity Economy Initiative (SEI), with links to the Boston Ujima Project described, we first traveled to Boston for an initial workshop with community organizers, who laid out their own theory of movement- based solidarity economy. After this discussion we visited the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), a longstanding and important community land trust in Boston, for a tour and conversation. Throughout the semester, in groups of two and three, students interviewed different organizational members of the network. The transcriptions were then used internally for ongoing conversations, and from the transcriptions and additional research we also created organizational profiles for external use, which are now up on the network’s website. In addition to the labor that students provided, we were able to bring significant financial support to each organization and speakers, as compensation for their workshop and presentations.

These projects culminated in a statewide effort to bring Kali Akuno of Cooperation Jackson to Massachusetts for multiple conversations to help strengthen and expand the growing solidarity economy assemblage. Akuno helped to facilitate our first statewide solidarity economy network gathering in western Massachusetts that involved organizers and lead- ers of community organizations across the state; he was part of internal conversations in Boston networks and was a featured presenter at the series of community-based workshops mentioned in the introduction to this essay; and he led conversations in Worcester, Massachusetts, as well. These were important conversations, in no small part because of how they continued to deepen relationships between organizations and networks in Massachusetts and beyond. We coordinated with all three networks on timing and logistics, and we organized academic funding from numerous departments to help pay for Akuno’s trip, in return for a presentation at UMass that was attended by hundreds of faculty and students. To be clear, this class was not responsible for bringing Akuno and had nothing directly to do with the network events. But we were able to marshal resources to help with this effort to strengthen and expand the growing solidarity economy assemblage, our aim as earlier described: we allowed ourselves and were able both to be—in a modest way—assembled by and to help assemble solidarity economy.

*Lines of Connection and a Politics of Becoming*

Joining the above efforts to expand and strengthen the SE assemblage through work intended to support organizational projects and interests was the complementary effort of supporting a shift in student subjectivities, and helping them to further desire and actualize a process of becoming; becoming other people—as part of other worlds—and articulate into the growing assemblage.

For some students, just the exposure to social and economic possibility, and learning about initiatives engaged in fomenting social and economic possibility, was a significant intervention.

Said one student, “Just knowing that these organizations exist and that other economies are possible . . . I just didn’t have any idea.”

Said another, “I mean, my whole life (until this class) I have only heard about economic change in terms of taxes, and government spending. The idea of people forming their own, solidarity economy a grassroots thing is new and exciting for me. That’s a big thing.”

And for another student, exposure to a language of economic dif- ference in solidarity economy politics discussed in solidarity economy frameworks and visualized in solidarity economy maps was a powerful intervention: “I thought the economy was just one thing . . . I had never [thought] about the economy in this way . . . that we could work or trade [or] do business in ways that were good for each other and for the planet.”

And for other students, working outside the classroom and interacting with people participating in solidarity economy activity was essential. Said one student, “You really see it working and talked to the people involved [and that] makes it feel more real and more accessible.” (Quotes are from written comments and my own notes from conversations and interviews)

After completing the course, students universally stated that they believed other economies and other worlds were possible where well-being for people and the planet was centered, and most stated that they were now actively changing their own behaviors to help bring this about, even as they had serious questions about how to be effective in their actions. Some students felt and desired themselves as part of a broader solidarity economy movement that they had worked with all semester, said one student: “I now plan to devote my life in some way” to solidarity economy politics. Another student was inspired to work with a community organizing group that is also working around cooperative development. Another student interned with a national coalition of organizations working on creating new economies. Another is currently searching for ways to volunteer with movement-based solidarity economy efforts in Boston. Another is directing career efforts toward expanding community-based care. And for others, the work brought into focus the importance and possibility of claiming a different economy and sociality from within their existing relationships. Said one student, “Take back personal lives, beings actually liv[ing] in common with each other and not just in terms of their work but seeing each other in terms of family . . . it is crucial for this shift.”

On a certain level, just these shifts in consciousness and intention are important and signal a politics of becoming, enabling students to detach further from dominant narratives about how to be in the world, and seek connections to other assemblages where communities are organizing politics and relations that might help them and us learn to be in common and survive well. It is impossible to predict, of course, if these shifts will last, how they will take hold, and where they will lead. But I do think they offer trajectories and lines of connection for economic becoming. Following are two examples to show this in more detail.

**Jo**

One student, whom I will call Jo, shows how a shift in consciousness and a reorientation of desire around ethical cooperative economies—and in particular the meaning and nature of work—resulted in an articulation into an assembling solidarity economy. Jo is from a working-class background, and while at UMass worked many hours a week at a retail shop in a strip mall five miles off campus in order to pay bills and make rent. Jo entered the class without much direct political experience and not knowing anything about solidarity economies or alternative economic initiatives. Over the course of the semester, previously unknown possibilities began to unfold as students engaged with the different aspects of our teaching and learning methods assemblage.

Reading and theorizing economic difference provided an initial breakthrough for Jo to begin to imagine possibility more expansively: “A lot of the transforming [for me] was knowing about other possibilities, other economic systems, other social systems, and that was the first step for making some kind of change.” When the classroom, and my own teaching, were de-centered and placed alongside and in some ways subservient to the teachings of other community members, deeper learnings began to take hold through conversations and encounters with solidarity economy actors. Other economies were not just theoretically possible but were experienced as actually existing, tangible, and real.

“Our visits and conversations [with community members and organizations] were very important, very valuable to me. It was great to get out there and see it, actually happening and seeing . . . like walking around at DSNI (a community land trust), seeing the areas that they had integrated, and meeting one of the tenants out on the street . . . seeing the effects, the fields that they had set up, the gardens, the houses, and hear the stories.” (The more sustained examples in Jo’s assessments and Carrie’s, following, are from semi-structured interviews)

Jo goes on to describe the importance of learning how ethical concerns and collective well-being could be incorporated into the way that people work.

“The interviews too were very valuable. We did so many interviews, we practiced with each other, we did them over the internet, Skype, in person. It was nice to get a chance to talk with people [who were doing it] about this stuff . . . and [learn that] we weren’t in over our heads. I [interviewed] one of the worker owners of Old Windows Workshop. It was a great conversation. I really admire what they do there. It’s a great story, how they wanted to set up this construction business par- ticularly for women. They wanted to give women the ability to work with their hands, and this restoration work . . . without schedule re- strictions that bar mothers from doing this sort of work, they have to get their kids off the bus, or get to them to school.”

By the end of the semester, Jo had begun to understand himself as po- tentially part of another economy and another world in which he could find a connected, meaningful livelihood. The changing understanding of labor—that it could be cooperative and ethical, like the Old Windows Workshop—is particularly instructive.

“I have to work. I have to do labor . . . I feel like I have a strange idea to work. It’s always made me really nervous. I would say that I sort of took it for granted, that you have to sort of have to accept that ‘that is the situation,’ that you work and it is shitty and that it’s too bad. I never really [had] any solid conception about what it was that I would be doing.”

Jo went on to describe that—in contrast to his retail job and other posi- tions he has had where he felt alienated and disempowered and in part predatory in relation to customers—through engaging with the course’s methods assemblage,

“I learned that you can be engaged with the world through your work and so it becomes part of my life and something that I am getting involved more in. We talked a lot about being involved with the com- munity, that is something that stuck with me, that is where change can happen, and just, I don’t know how to summarize it, but the benefits of living a life more connected to the community rather than not being involved.”

What Jo was getting at here was not the importance of the type of work, or finding a passion, but social relationships of doing work that could make it meaningful. Indeed, after the course ended, Jo set out to find a position that would allow him to have control over his own working conditions and to be in community with his co-workers, and after half a year’s search, he landed a position at an established worker coopera- tive doing the same type of job he was doing in retail but with different arrangements.

“If I were just doing customer service for a capitalist company, I would be saying this is really wanted, I wouldn’t be saying oh it’s what I want- ed. It’s because it’s the context of what I am doing. I have that, it’s a cooperative now and I can feel good about what I am doing, know- ing that someone else isn’t just profiting off of it? I want to do some- thing that is making things better rather than worse. Being involved in something like this was sort of an overall desirable life choice I am engaged with the world through my work and so it becomes part of my life and something that I am getting involved more in.”

**Carrie**

Another student, whom I will call Carrie, came to the course with a his- tory of activism and a desire to change the world, but up to that point these desires had been largely relegated to a politics of inclusion into the dominant economy and dominant reality.

“Before taking your classes, I hadn’t really had any exposure to sol- idarity economies or [non-capitalist] alternatives. I had been polit- ically active and had been doing stuff that was progressive but I didn’t know how and where [to make a difference]. [The class] kind of connected things, and I learned [about] so much that was already happening, and so much theory.”

Carrie pointed to the way in which the methods assemblage, which was designed to amplify a particular reality, pulled them along and acted as a sort of conveyor toward solidarity economy as part of a politics of becoming.

“I think that the readings and discussions we had in class, and the talks and workshops, and the projects and all of those combined, I don’t want to say radicalized me, but I guess, yeah yeah [laughing], I guess it did. So definitely, I was unaware of worker cooperatives, community land trusts—and I know that’s on the surface [of a deeper politics], but I was in the dark and it totally opened my eyes.”

Carrie continues,

“Field trips and work with organizations first hand was really impact- ful, and like actually seeing first hand that people are doing things and it’s successful and things can actually change and not just reading that in an article, because I feel like sometimes, that’s so far from where you are as a student in a classroom that it’s almost hard to imagine. . . .And to know that this is what people are doing every day and work- ing really hard to bring it about—especially since they were was so close and also like bringing the speakers here—like Kali [Akuno],

was really great and I think it exposes people who aren’t necessarily in these courses but are active, and [can become] aware the things that are going on in Jackson and so on.”

Carrie summarizes how this process of becoming, people’s own transformation as part of an assembling politics, has revealed and amplified the growing reality of other economies and other worlds:

“It’s pretty obvious that there other worlds that are existing right now and things that are happening and I think that a transition out of the current political-economic, social situation that we are in is possible; right now we are at such a precarious [moment] that it’s either going to collapse, or collapse and rebuild, or I think that there is so much that is happening right now for other worlds, it reminds me [of] what the Zapatistas would say, that we [can create] a world where many worlds are possible. I don’t think it can be a singular, but a world where everyone feels valued, and not suffering, and relating to the environment in a just way.”

And the importance of this revelation, for Carrie, is precisely existential and ontological.

“It’s like, that when you are so deep in everything that’s happening and watching the news, it’s kind of difficult to picture yourself—but it’s like, we have to, it’s either transition or we fucking die.”

*Conclusion*

In the two examples, both students are describing their own experiences as part of a politics of becoming, an ongoing process of becoming other. Both students had begun the course with embodied rejections of the dominant reality, experienced as dissatisfaction, anxiety, and alienation. Jo’s experience and acceptance of work as an individuating, disempowering inevitability—and latent desires for connection and meaning— found a line of connection through practices of collective determination and ethical decision making around labor conditions in a worker co- operative. Carrie’s existent desires to change the world through activist politics were amplified and found greater clarity and resonance with solidarity economy movements. Over the course of the semester and beyond, Jo and Carrie moved toward and articulated into a solidarity economy politics that is creating or might be able to create the conditions for communities to make and remake themselves outside the dictates of patriarchal capitalist modernity.

To be very clear here, this had little to do with any intervention that I made as a “classroom instructor” and everything to do with de-centering and entangling the class into solidarity economy as part of a methods assemblage. Pedagogy was not limited to helping students to know or critique the world. Indeed, critical explorations were contained within a more fundamental project of helping to open, expand, and advance an assembling solidarity economy and, through this process, helping stu- dents find lines of connection to this emerging reality.

Of course, I also do not want to overstate any efficacies or successes of this project. It is impossible to predict how any particular individual or entity will be or become. Capitalism and the One World World contain and constrain our desires for becoming other even as parts of our bodies seek somatic release and we involve ourselves in other narratives, practices, and relations. For example, at the time of writing, one student who took a position with a solidarity economy organization had to quit because of mental health issues. Another student is currently struggling to get out from under a low-wage job in order to be able to engage more actively in solidarity economy politics and practice.

Even more, there are lots of questions around how to engage with the world that we are in while creating the world(s) that we want. These questions are, of course, not theoretical but are of central importance to solidarity economy leaders and practitioners. Solidarity economy efforts are no guarantee of escaping the One World World; solidarity economy can be relegated to an effort to “fill in the gaps,” or aligned with a slightly more just and sustainable form of development, or built through a set of normative, primarily economic commitments that exclude a critical engagement with other world-making projects—like colonialism, white supremacy, and the very notion of progress. As solidarity economy expands and becomes more durable, this and other world-making transition assemblages must be worked and reworked as a politics that is already and always in the making. Teaching and learning that understands itself as amplifying—not just understanding and critiquing—reality, can more intentionally untangle from the world as it currently exists and entangle itself into a collaborative politics of ontological possibility.

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