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Reading Foucault with Gibson-Graham:

The Political Economy of “Other Spaces” in Berlin

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In recent years, Berlin has been widely acclaimed for the creative enactment of alternative urban imaginaries. This article explores how such spaces of urban alterity can be theorized from a political economy perspective. The beginning section explores the extent to which the “be berlin” campaign succeeds in representing the economic diversity embodied by these alternative sites. The middle section draws on the work of Gibson-Graham and Foucault to develop a heterotopic reading of economic diversity, focusing on three distinct aspects: the ubiquity and multiplicity of “other spaces,” the (il)legibility of the spatial order, and the politics of difference articulated through heterotopias. The final section applies this heterotopic perspective by deploying the urban garden project Prinzessinnengarten as an example.

Key Words: Community Economy, Economic Diversity, Heterotopia, Right to the City, Urban Economics

Things touch against the banks of discourse because they appear in the hollow space of representation.

—Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*



When going for a walk by the Spree River in Berlin, I often pass a spot where the gray monotony of the railings is interrupted by a set of colorfully painted tins converted into flowerpots. This anonymous intervention in public space, which gives the passerby a seemingly absurd encounter with some rather frail-looking plants, never fails to raise a sympathetic smile. The economist in me, meanwhile, muses about the gift economy being enacted through this gesture and remembers Lefebvre's admonition that Marxist analysis and politics should be concerned with the city as a whole rather than persisting in preoccupation with the factory as a privileged site of class struggle and with the industrial proletariat as the primary subject of radical social transformation (see Harvey 2012). But how to theoretically pin down the diffuse sense of this urban alterity that permeates Berlin so strongly? How to conceptualize countless encounters with alternative urban imaginaries, both small and large, from a political economy perspective? How to develop a sense

of analytical coherence that is enabling, from the theoretical and political perspective, yet that avoids the theoretical closure that often comes with the concretion of economic difference?

Although the low-key ingenuity with which grassroots initiatives reappropriate and rejuvenate the postindustrial landscape has become something of a hallmark of Berlin, only scant attention has been paid to theorizing these much-acclaimed practices of urban alterity from an economic perspective.¹ In the article's first section, I use the city's image campaign, "be berlin," as a template to critically discuss local policymakers' vision of urban economic diversity. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault and J. K. Gibson-Graham, the article's middle section explores the distinct meanings of spatial otherness that might emerge in a theoretical encounter with postcapitalist politics. I develop a heterotopic reading of economic diversity, which serves as juxtaposition to the mainstream vision reflected in "be berlin." In the article's final section, the urban garden project Prinzessinnengarten is introduced to exemplify the heterotopic perspective and to suggest possible ways in which representations of "be berlin" could be resignified.

The "be berlin" Campaign and the Politics of Economic Representation

The city marketing campaign, "be berlin," serves as a particularly good example to illustrate the vision of economic diversity that currently informs policymaking in Berlin. Launched by the local government in 2008, the campaign aims to promote Berlin as an attractive location, a cosmopolitan city that is well worth traveling to, living in, and investing in. The image of a

diverse metropolis is reinforced through a bricolage of portraits in which local celebrities, residents, and enterprises comment on what it means for them to be part of Berlin—hence the campaign title, *be berlin*.

At the economic level, the campaign presents Berlin as a city that has successfully met its own twin challenge of economic restructuring: that of strengthening service and knowledge-intensive industries as the postindustrial economic basis of the city and that of transforming the centrally-planned economy of East Berlin into a capitalist market economy. The set of economic assets listed on the campaign homepage under the title “City of Opportunities” illustrate where Berlin’s policymakers locate the strengths of a diversified urban economy; these assets emphasize a high density of entrepreneurs and research institutions, strong economic growth, an ethnically diverse and highly skilled workforce, a green city with modern infrastructure, a mentality of open-mindedness that encourages experimenting with new ideas, a high level of public safety, affordable housing and commercial real estate, extensive business networks, and “the cultural and lifestyle opportunities that stimulate creative innovators.”² Not surprisingly, the role of Berlin as an international nodal point for cultural and creative industries features prominently in this account. The vision of a twenty-first-century “industrial metropolis” as the motor of urban economic growth and employment is written equally large. Paraphrasing John F. Kennedy’s historic pronouncement, “I am a Berliner,” the campaign showcases an array of local manufacturing products.³ The broad variety of sectors in which the featured companies operate and the size differences of their enterprises (from multinational corporations to small- and medium-size enterprises and self-employed artisans) serve to represent a highly diversified urban economy.

Despite its notable commitment to represent diversity within the economic sphere, the campaign falls short on two crucial points. First, as critics have rightly pointed out (for example, in campaign spoofs), the desire to portray an array of urban livelihoods is bound to clash with the campaign's objective to develop a "brand profile" for the city. The goal of attracting global resources inevitably limits the range of representations that a campaign like "be berlin" can afford to display (Harvey 2012). Pressing issues such as poverty, precarity, racism, gentrification, and the dire state of public finances do not make it to the billboards, as the purpose of the campaign disallows for a problematization of social inequality in urban spaces (unless there is a success story along the lines of "rags to riches" to tell).

My second point of critique concerns the capitalocentric⁴ economic discourse that the *be berlin* campaign reproduces. To the extent that economic difference is primarily understood with reference to firm size, product range, or the ethnic composition of the work force, noncapitalist forms of production and nonmarket relations of exchange are bound to remain marginalized, even invisible. Oftentimes they are subsumed under the umbrella of a unitary capitalist economy, as is the case with the so-called creative industries, which are considered to be incubators for capitalist entrepreneurship: "In recent years, the city has become extremely attractive to creative minds from around the globe; they meet likeminded people here and enjoy putting their ideas into practice like true pioneers. In Berlin their entrepreneurial plans are on fruitful ground."⁵ The fluidity with which "be berlin" implies a chain of equivalence between creativity and (capitalist) entrepreneurship is symptomatic of a failure to envision alternative class relations as part of the economic landscape. While the campaign maps some of the and "innovation hotspots" and the text evokes the vague image of creative industries as experimental sites where "work models and

work environments of the future” are being tried out,⁶ it does not mention concrete postcapitalist models such as the peer-production networks, cooperatives, and collectives that are already going strong in Berlin. Similarly, the campaign relegates the public sector to the role of an ancillary institution that facilitates capitalist growth by providing business services, maintaining a high-quality transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, funding research facilities at the city’s public universities, and providing “the best conditions for [subsidized investment] funding within the EU.”⁷ Last but not least, there are those sites and subjects of the economy that remain completely outside “be berlin’s” depiction of economic diversity, such as unpaid reproductive labor and volunteer work. While the volunteer sector at least receives a mention as civic (but not economic) engagement and is “honored with a large-scale poster on the Siegessäule”⁸ (one of the major monuments in Berlin), the campaign remains utterly silent about the enormous amounts of unpaid care and domestic work produced in thousands of Berlin households. Given the statistical estimates that unpaid labor accounts for roughly 60 percent of total work hours in Germany (BMFSFJ and Statistisches Bundesamt 2003, 9), this is a rather grave omission and illustrative of a curtailed understanding of economic diversity that reduces the notion of heterogeneity to variations within capitalism.

Toward a Heterotopic Perspective

How can we move away from such capitalocentrism and cultivate openness toward noncapitalist practices in urban spaces? How can economic discourse nurture a language of difference that recognizes the distinctive characteristics embodied by emergent forms of postcapitalist practices

instead of subsuming them under the mantle of capitalism? What would such a theory look like, which could creatively engage with a proliferation of new ways of organizing the economics of everyday life? In this section, I draw on points of theoretical congruence between Gibson-Graham's postcapitalist politics and Foucault's theory of "other spaces" in order to outline a heterotopic perspective on the political economy of urban spaces.

In a 1967 lecture entitled *Des espaces autres* ("Of Other Spaces"),⁹ Foucault (2008, 17) broadly defined heterotopias as "places that are written into the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias." His emphasis on the positive ontological status of "other spaces" certainly resonates with Gibson-Graham's participatory action research, which is carried out in collaboration with communities that are exploring concrete trajectories of economic transformation toward sustainable livelihoods, "starting here and now," by activating the resources they collectively have at hand. Below, I elaborate in some analytical detail on three points of proximity between Foucault and Gibson-Graham that I consider particularly helpful for delineating a heterotopic perspective on the economy: the ubiquity and multiplicity of "other spaces," the (il)legibility of the spatial order, and the politics of difference articulated through heterotopias. Let us look at each of these points in turn.

The Ubiquity and Diversity of Heterotopias

Early on in *Des espaces autres*, Foucault (2008, 18) points out that heterotopias can be encountered everywhere, although "perhaps one would not find one single form of heterotopia

that is absolutely universal.” In this short statement we encounter a twofold rejection of the notion of a social totality: For one, Foucault argues for the ubiquity of “other spaces,” thus undermining the idea of a social space subsumed under a unitary logic. At the same time, he distances himself from the idea of a simple bifurcation of the social in a way that would suggest a singular Other Space confronting an equally uniform space of mainstream Sameness. The specific examples he introduces throughout the lecture underline his argument for a differentiated, pluralistic theory of “other spaces” that accounts for variegated relations of “otherness” spelled out in distinct sociospatial constellations. In a remarkable theoretical feat, Foucault makes the case for considering a seemingly arbitrary collection of spaces such as retirement homes, cemeteries, cinemas, museums, fairgrounds, holiday resorts, army barracks, American motel rooms, psychiatric hospitals, and Jesuit colonies, as illustrative of a complex heterotopic perspective.

While Foucault himself never commented on the possibility of heterotopias in the field of economics, Gibson-Graham have taken up the idea and developed an innovative theory of diverse economies. Echoing Foucault’s arguments about the heterogeneity of space, Gibson-Graham and scholars affiliated with the Community Economies Research Network (CERN)¹⁰ have conducted numerous case studies and community audits that document the myriad ways in which economic livelihoods are being organized outside of the purview of the capitalist market economy. Gibson-Graham’s heterotopic perspective prejudices neither the scope nor the content of such “other spaces.” And there is certainly no claim being laid to producing an authoritative account of what may qualify as postcapitalist forms of enterprise, work, exchange, finance, or property (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013).

It is this openness that allows the diverse economies model to establish a theoretical connection among the bewildering varieties of “other spaces” that exist in Berlin, such as alternative markets (exemplified by local currencies, clothes-swap parties, consumer cooperatives), sites of nonmarket transactions (open-design platforms, gratis online media), unremunerated labor practices (volunteer work in community gardens), noncapitalist forms of enterprise (workers’ collectives, including bike messengers, artists, printers, and educators), and communal ownership constellations (building cooperatives, squats) just to name a few. Rather than either dismissing these practices as subcultural fancies or hyping them as niche markets that will develop into the next big capitalist innovation, the diverse economies framework simply shows how self-organized groups reshape the economic parameters of everyday urban life, enacting economic citizenship. Putting these practices on the map gives voice to multifaceted critiques against the capitalist market economy (including the critique of ecological destruction, forms of exploitation, the privatization of commons, and the commodification of basic human necessities) while simultaneously foregrounding what is uniquely valuable about the alternatives that have emerged out of these critiques. However, the performative definition of otherness that both Foucault and Gibson-Graham cultivate in their heterotopic perspectives has raised concerns about whether this approach completely undermines any claim to theoretical coherence. As the discussion below illustrates, this sort of irritation related to theory is quite deliberate.

The (Il)legibility of Order

Inspired by Foucault’s pioneering work, “a dazzling variety of spaces have been explored as

illustrations of heterotopia, including the Palais Royal, masonic lodges and early factories, landscapes, environmental installations, postmodern cities and buildings, internet sites and dozens more” (Johnson 2006, 81). This list has been supplemented by Saldanha, who cites analyses of Disneyland, Las Vegas, El Paso’s Border Control Museum, a Buddhist monument, women’s colleges, Vancouver’s public library, alternative theatre, Greek-American fiction, cyberporn, Kafka’s work, South African “security parks,” global capitalism, and the media as case studies of heterotopia. Saldanha (2008, 2083) sardonically concludes: “One wonders where there is still space left for mainstream society.”

In the absence of a clear classificatory logic pertaining to the otherness of sociospatial configurations, Foucault’s enlistment of highly disparate spaces as heterotopias has indeed generated much scholarly controversy. David Harvey (2000, 185), for example, judges the apparent arbitrariness of heterotopias as utterly inadequate in analytical terms: “What appears at first sight as so open by virtue of its multiplicity suddenly appears either as banal (an eclectic mess of heterogeneous and different spaces within which anything ‘different’—however defined—might go on) or as a more sinister fragmentation of spaces that are closed, exclusionary, and even threatening within a more comprehensive dialectics of historical and geographical transformation.”

Edward Soja (1996, 162), who himself has contributed an extensive study of Los Angeles as heterotopia, admits that “heterotopologies are frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent. They seem narrowly focused on peculiar microgeographies, nearsighted and near-sited, deviant and deviously apolitical.” Yet he contends that Foucault’s main contribution should perhaps be sought elsewhere, namely in his “assertion of an alternative envisioning of

spatiality ... [that] directly challenges (and is intended to challengingly deconstruct) all conventional modes of spatial thinking” (163). Considering Foucault’s lecture on heterotopia in the context of his writings on the production of knowledge, Topinka (2010, 56) concurs that “heterotopias are not primarily sites of resistance to power but instead sites of reordering ... By juxtaposing and combining many spaces in one site, heterotopias problematize received knowledge by revealing and destabilizing the ground ... on which knowledge is built. To be sure, this destabilization can offer an avenue for resistance. Yet a shift in focus from resistance to knowledge production reveals how heterotopias make order legible.” With the interventions of Soja and Topinka, the focus thus shifts from a diagnostics of the inadequacy of Foucault’s theoretical framework to the productive potential of heterotopia as a conceptual instrument in the deconstruction of order.

Foucault himself explicates this point in the preface to *The Order of Things* by commenting on a short story entitled “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins,” by Jorge Luis Borges. Fascinated by Borges’s idea of an encyclopedia organized according to a seemingly incoherent structure, Foucault (1973, xv) remarks on how this encounter destabilizes our binary mode of thinking along the lines of “the Same and the Other,” as the unusual ordering in this fictitious encyclopedia causes “all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things” to be broken up. Borges does indeed employ a bewildering classificatory scheme that renders the idea of a coherent order ad absurdum. His “Chinese” encyclopedia classifies animals into: “(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair

brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies” (quoted in Foucault 1973, xv).

In this passage, Borges offers several ways to categorize animals. He suggests orders that are based on property relations, on activities undertaken, on biological, social, or affective conditions, on representational schemes, or on the distinction between the real versus the phantasmic. Foucault’s lecture on heterotopias seems to follow a similar, if less extreme, pattern. The principles listed in *Des espaces autres* do not only preclude a clear-cut categorization of space into heterotopic and nonheterotopic. As discussed in the previous section, they also allow for a maximum of disparity within heterotopic space. The Foucauldian notion of heterotopia, in this sense, marks a refusal to define a coherent order of alterity, to draw the boundaries of sociospatial difference, to predefine its conditions of existence, to restrain its creativity or prejudge its effectivity in challenging the hegemonic order. Foucault (1973, xvii–xviii) is of course well aware of the disconcerting effect this can have vis-à-vis the reassuring coherence of a utopian discourse:

Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold ... Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy “syntax” in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things ... to “hold together”. This is why utopias permit

fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the fabula; heterotopias ... desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.

Just as Foucault's heterotopic perspective prompts us to think beyond the theoretical comfort zone provided by a preconceived order, Gibson-Graham's ontological reframing of the economy incites us to explore what lies outside of the familiar parameters of market capitalism. The influence of Foucault is duly acknowledged in *The End of Capitalism*, in the authors' statement that they "were inspired to some extent by Foucault in *The Order of Things*, where 'orders' or classifications are made to appear strange or ridiculous as part of a strategy of denaturalization" (Gibson-Graham 1996, 9n19). Challenging the primacy accorded to capitalism in economic representations, Gibson-Graham ask us what postcapitalist possibilities might emerge if we were to give up the tight confines of a legible economic discourse held together by capitalocentric certitude: "What if we were to depict social existence at loose ends with itself ... rather than producing social representations in which everything is part of the same complex and therefore ultimately 'means the same thing' (e.g. capitalist hegemony)? What might be the advantages of representing a rich and prolific disarray?" (ix).

In other words, Gibson-Graham's objective is to extend the economic realm beyond the familiar chain of equivalences constructed between the economy, the market, and capitalism without restricting what that "beyond" may encompass or instigate. And although the diverse economies framework operates with clearly defined economic categories such as transactions,

constellations of work, production relations, finance, and property (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013), the goal is not to produce a comprehensive map of the economy that enables readers to slot economic processes into one of these predefined categories. Rather, the diverse economies project furnishes the terrain for a language of economic difference to evolve dynamically: “We are not overtly concerned with the chaotic and non-comprehensible aspects of this language experiment as our objective is not to produce a finished and coherent template that maps the economy ‘as it really is’ and presents ... a ready-made ‘alternative economy.’ Our project is to disarm and dislocate the naturalized hegemony of the capitalist economy and make the space for new economic becomings—ones that we will need to work at to produce” (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 60).

As both Jonathan Diskin and George DeMartino point out in their respective contributions to the first part of this symposium,¹¹ the question is not whether one can act in the absence of the grounding provided by order but rather what ethical choices are made under such circumstances.¹² This brings us to the last point in this section: namely, to the implications carried by the unfixing of order, in terms of a heterotopic politics of difference.

A Heterotopic Politics of Economic Difference

What relevance does the above-described challenge against the legibility of economic order have in terms of policy? How does it affect the viability of “other spaces”? Inspired by Latour’s sociology of associations and Callon’s theory of the performativity of the social, Gibson-Graham’s economic representations retain a strong sensitivity to process-orientedness, including

a theoretical contingency concerning both the intracategorical order and the repertory of categories foregrounded in any specific empirical context. As the overall oeuvre of Gibson-Graham and the research by CERN both show, this performative approach to the economy opens space for a profoundly innovative politics of economic language, subjectivity, and collective action (Gibson-Graham 2006b, x). Accordingly,

The problem of how to represent a particular social configuration ... for us has become less a question of accuracy or fidelity (to the “truth” of what we describe or seek to understand) than one of “performativity.” When we tell a story and represent a social practice or site, what kind of social world do we construct and endow with the force of representation? What are its possibilities, its mobilities and flows, its contiguities and interconnections, its permeabilities, its implications for other worlds, known and unknown? What, on the other hand, are its obduracies, its boundaries and divisions, its omissions and exclusions, its dead ends, nightmare passages, or blind alleys? ... And how might its representation participate in constituting subjects of affect or action? All these questions press upon us when we consider the performative or constitutive role of social representation. (Gibson-Graham 1996, 206–7)

To clarify the significance of this performative strategy to “take back the economy,” let us juxtapose it to Harvey’s politics of “the right to the city.” While sharing an enthusiasm about the “multiple practices within the urban that ... are full to overflowing with alternative

possibilities,” Harvey (2012, xvii) ultimately considers them to be embattled sites, constantly engaged in an uphill struggle against global capitalist forces that want to co-opt, subsume, or crush them (through the gentrification of neighborhoods or the commodification of alternative lifestyles for example). According to Harvey, we therefore need global anticapitalist solutions, control over the organization of the international division of labor and the exchange relations in the world market, and the technological capacity to manage global supply chains. Nothing less will suffice because “socialism, communism ... in one city is an impossible proposition” (xvi). As such, Harvey’s politics inevitably sees the diverse economy folded back into the capitalist totality. In contrast, Scott Sharpe in his contribution to this symposium illustrates how Gibson-Graham deploy a strategy of impotentiality to counter the disempowering effects of capitalocentric discourse. Building on Agamben’s work, he uses the notion of impotentiality to draw attention to our capacity to not act, to not concur with a politics that narrowly confines (or sometimes outright denies) our agency to act as economic subjects. For Sharpe, activating this capacity to not act is just as crucial for a postcapitalist politics as is nourishing our potentiality to improve our individual and collective well-being.

Negotiating the meaning of community and the parameters of “other spaces” constitutes an important dimension of collective potentiality. Using discussions of commons as an example, Stavrides highlights the connections between the social, political, spatial, and economic dimensions of “other spaces”:

I favour the idea of providing ground to build a public realm and give opportunities for discussing and negotiating what is good for all, rather than the

idea of strengthening communities in their struggle to define their own commons. Relating commons to groups of “similar” people bears the danger of eventually creating closed communities ... Conceptualizing commons on the basis of the public, however, does not focus on similarities or differences between people that can possibly meet on a purposefully instituted common ground. We have to establish a ground of negotiation rather than a ground of affirmation of what is shared. We don’t simply have to raise the moral issues about what it means to share, but to discover procedures through which we can find out what and how to share. (An Architektur 2010, 6)

Therefore, a radical political praxis needs to retain community as an empty signifier despite, or rather because of, the crucial role played by affective practices of identification in the context of community building. As Gibson-Graham (2006b, xv, n7; emphasis in the original) put it,

In approaching the task of signifying the community economy ... we must keep in mind the ever-present danger that any attempt to fix a fantasy of common being (sameness), to define the community economy, to specify what it contains (and thus what it does not) closes off the space of decision and the opportunity to cultivate ethical praxis. The space of decision as we have identified it is the emptiness at the center of the community economy; it constitutes the community economy as a *negativity* with potential to become, rather than a *positivity* with clear contents and outlines.¹³

If the community economy is conceived as a negativity that comes into being through a process of ethical negotiation, it follows that—contrary to a common misperception—a heterotopic perspective cannot be expected to provide a sociospatial blueprint. Rather, as Özselçuk and Madra (forthcoming) point out, the “*alternative* in the diverse economies framework ... stands for the possibility of producing a new relation to economy and practicing interdependency through struggling over, negotiating and building a space from the differences internal to the existing economic configurations or entities.” Foucault (2008, 17) makes a similar point, albeit using a different line of argumentation. He writes that heterotopias function as “a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements ... are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.” In the second part of this sentence, in particular, Foucault clarifies that the otherness of space need not (and cannot) stand for a clear break with the existing order. He thus presents as constitutive that which is often perceived as failure: namely, that heterotopias are not autarkic liberated zones where a pure, harmonious form of alterity reigns.¹⁴ On the contrary, Foucault is adamant that heterotopias remain enmeshed with (or in Althusserian parlance, are overdetermined by) the very social relations they contest. A heterotopic perspective therefore stands as much for ambiguity and contradiction as for a positive articulation of difference.

One remarkable project that consciously rejects the idea of implementing a blueprint is the heterotopic urban gardening initiative Prinzessinnengarten in Berlin. Although the experimental approach means having to do the hard work of trying to figure things out collectively, the joy that comes from having a breathing space where affective, political, and

creative energies can flow freely is palpable in the garden. I would therefore like to conclude the article with a discussion of how this urban common articulates a complex and contradictory heterotopia.

Prinzessinnengarten: A Heterotopic Urban Gardening Project

Located at the heart of the borough of Kreuzberg, which is infamous for its long activist tradition, the urban gardening project Prinzessinnengarten¹⁵ provides an experimental space that uniquely combines political praxis and recreation. The daily routines of gardening serve as a vehicle for critical reflection on issues such as the mass production of food, consumption patterns, interrelations between urban dwellers, relations with the environment, the organization of livelihoods, and the sharing of urban space (see Nomadisch Grün 2012). Formally organized as a social enterprise, the garden is run by paid staff and a core group of volunteers. While the premises are open to visitors on a daily basis, those interested can also contribute to the collective gardening effort on dedicated days of the week.

A collective procedure of evaluation accompanies any project proposal for the garden, with decisions being guided by three criteria: economic viability, compatibility with the garden's overall concept, and the potential for knowledge enhancement (Nomadisch Grün 2012, 72). A correspondingly eclectic mix of market and nonmarket resources secures the existence of Prinzessinnengarten: the sale of self-grown organic plants and produce; revenue generated through the garden café, project funds, in-kind and monetary donations; fees charged for

consulting services provided to offshoot gardens; foundation grants; unpaid volunteer labor; the “upcycling” of objects found on the street; as well as income derived from guest lectures, guided tours, and participation in cultural events such as theater festivals, conferences, exhibitions, and the Berlinale Film Festival. The revenue thus generated serves to pay for rent, upkeep, taxes, and staff wages and ensures the realization of educational projects. While the economic viability of the project is thus ascertained, the return on investment is primarily measured in terms of the acquisition of new knowledge and experiences rather than any monetary profit (30–1, 81).

Through these activities, Prinzessinnengarten has succeeded in developing its own unique take on the politics of collective action. The public property on which the garden is located¹⁶ has been turned into a common where people can engage in agricultural activities, attend cultural events, or just hang out. None of the garden plots is reserved for individual ownership or use. This stance on property relations carries over to the immaterial realm, with the garden serving as a knowledge common on themes related to urban agriculture and social enterprise. As Robert Shaw, one of the initiators of the project, put it: “The garden basically functions like Wikipedia, and we are its editors” (Nomadisch Grün 2012, 70).¹⁷

Concerns raised in public forums, around environmental sustainability, urban land use, social justice, and perceptions of wealth and well-being, constitute further pillars of this politics of collective action, which goes hand-in-hand with a politics of language whereby “concepts such as empowerment, food sovereignty, biodiversity, resilience, social cohesion, informal learning or social entrepreneurship enter the garden vocabulary” (Nomadisch Grün 2012, 57). At the same time, Prinzessinnengarten is driven by a pragmatic politics of subjectivity, with the desire of developing more meaningful and viable ways of organizing one’s own livelihood acting

as a driving force for the instigation of the garden. This ambition to change things in the here and now has inspired participants to collectively negotiate around how to contribute and further develop existing skills and interests, how to experiment with new ideas, how to explore collaborations, and how to indulge in heuristic learning and a decelerated working day (25–35).

Like Gibson-Graham, the activists of Prinzessinnengarten report repeatedly confronting skepticism about the transformative potential of such a small-scale project. For the participants, however, the question of impact cannot be reduced to the size of the garden or the quantity of produce supplied. It can only be measured in terms of the impetus provided for reclaiming the city through community organizing; for raising an awareness of social, economic, and ecological interdependencies in urban spaces; and for accessing the resources at our disposal for building more sustainable communities (Nomadisch Grün 2012, 34, 59). Prinzessinnengarten's politics of collective action, language, and economic subjectivity articulates a heterotopic vision that perceives spatial otherness not as a form of rural autarky but, on the contrary, as an interweaving and critical engagement with its urban surroundings:

Prinzessinnengarten did not originate from a longing for the rural. On the contrary, perhaps it was the longing for the urban that brought this garden into being. It is not a place to flee from the present, from the technics and hectic-ness of the metropolis into the simplicity of rural life. It is a location that engages in a constant exchange and dialogue with the urban environment. And it is a place where the city can reflect upon its self-conception and its relation to the rural. Such urban agriculture connects the antithetical: the urban and the rural, shovels

and smartphones, hand-labeled garden plots and a blog, organically certified soil and plastic containers, urban culture and beekeeping, commitment and the necessity to make a living. (53)

To conclude with some food for thought, I would like to come back to the “be berlin” campaign and the idea of assembling a bricolage of urban representations. What if “be berlin” were an empty signifier that could be reappropriated and developed into a heterotopic representation of economic diversity—one that would highlight the rich politics of otherness underlying grassroots initiatives such as Prinzessinnengarten? Constructing an idiosyncratic language of economic difference (and collectivity) that truly matches the vibrancy of Berlin would indeed constitute a memorable theoretical intervention toward reclaiming the city.

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¹ As a representative of *visitberlin*, the city's official tourism agency, put it: "Berlin is a magnet, especially for the young creative [types]. The Berlin lifestyle fascinates people worldwide." (quoted in Puschner 2012). Its reputation as the ultimate playground of the creative classes has even earned Berlin the title of "Europe's Capital of Cool" in Time Magazine (see <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1934459,00.html>). It should be noted, however, that this philosophy of reclaiming the city competes with the conservative nation-building project, which rather successfully has been pushing for a monumental, romanticist reconstruction of the historic city center. A third contender for shaping the cityscape is capital with an interest in commodifying urban land (Duran 2009; Harvey 2012).

² See "Entrepreneurs in Berlin," Berlin Partner GmbH, accessed 7 December 2012, <http://www.be.berlin.de/campaign/city-of-opportunities/information/entrepreneurs-in-berlin>.

³ See "I Am a Berliner," Berlin Partner GmbH, accessed 7 December 2012, <http://www.be.berlin.de/campaign/i-am-a-berliner>.

⁴ Gibson-Graham (1996, 6) define capitalocentrism as follows: "When we say that most economic discourse is 'capitalocentric,' we mean that other forms of economy (not to mention noneconomic aspects of social life) are often understood primarily with reference to capitalism: as being fundamentally the same as (or modeled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations; as being opposite to capitalism; as being the complement of capitalism; as existing in capitalism's space or orbit."

⁵ See "Entrepreneurs in Berlin," Berlin Partner GmbH, accessed 7 December 2012, <http://www.be.berlin.de/campaign/city-of-opportunities/information/entrepreneurs-in-berlin>.

⁶ See "Berlin's Innovation-Hotspots," Berlin Partner GmbH, accessed 11 October 2013, <http://berlindustrie.de/allgemein/ererr/> and "Ideen in Berlin," Berlin Partner GmbH, accessed 7 December 2012, <http://www.sei.berlin.de/kampagne/stadt-der-chancen/informationen/ideen-in-berlin>.

⁷ See "City of Opportunities," Berlin Partner GmbH, accessed 10 December 2012,

<http://www.be.berlin.de/campaign/city-of-opportunities>.

⁸ See “2010—Industry and Social Engagement,” accessed 7 December 2012,

<http://www.be.berlin.de/campaign/campaignyears/2010>.

⁹ This lecture was given to the *Cercle d'études architecturales* (Circle of Architectural Studies) and constituted a revised version of a radio talk Foucault had held a year earlier. However, the manuscript was not published until 1984 when it was included in a volume for the International Building Exhibition (IBA) being held in Berlin (Foucault 2008, 13).

¹⁰ For an overview of the research and publications of this school of thought, see the homepage of CERN at www.communityeconomies.org.

¹¹ See *Rethinking Marxism* 25 (4).

¹² On this issue see also Özselçuk and Madra (forthcoming).

¹³ In this context, see also Ethan Miller's discussion of the solidarity economy movement in his contribution to part one of this symposium in *Rethinking Marxism* 25 (4).

¹⁴ North's (1999, 72) case study of Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) in Britain is a case in point. He argues that LETS are contested spaces “in which multiple claims about money and livelihood are raised and which then knock up against each other.” As heterotopic spaces LETS articulate a multifaceted critique of—and several alternatives to—capitalism. In the LETS that he studied, he found that while not all economic needs could be met within the network, they still had an empowering effect on members, enabling them “to live outside the mainstream economy in the here and now, as a realisable aim given the resources they had themselves rather than as a hoped-for future contingent on the actions of supportive elites and businesses” (75).

¹⁵ The name translates as “Princess Garden” and alludes to the name of the adjacent street, Prinzessinnenstraße. For more information and a virtual tour of the project see www.prinzessinnengarten.net.

¹⁶ The property had initially been earmarked for privatization by the local government. The short term of the lease granted to Prinzessinnengarten (one year, with the possibility of renewal until the

property was sold off) sparked the idea of creating a mobile garden built on crates and pallets, which could easily be transported to a different location if necessary. The enormous popularity of the project however, has led to a massive mobilization to preserve the garden, as a result of which the tenancy has been stabilized. (The concept of mobile urban gardens is also found in the work of *Atelier d'architecture autogérée* in Paris. See

<http://www.urbantactics.org/projects/rhizom/rhizom.html>.)

¹⁷ All translations from *Nomadisch Grün* (2012) are mine.