

Anti-Capitalism or Post-Capitalism? Both!

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A Response to papers by Jodi Dean and Stephen Healy in *Rethinking Marxism* 27 (3), 2015; Published in the same volume.

Why does the juxtaposition of these two papers, despite their radically different articulations of communist politics, feel like a *trap*? If I have wrestled with a desire to respond at length to the sloppy, non-concept of “left realism” against which Jodi Dean launches her monolithic politics, it is not because I want to spend my time arguing about the Party. Dean's “willed formation of united power” (2015, 8) would only concern me in the unlikely event that it became successful enough to repress autonomous initiatives in the name of Class Unity. My combative desire emerges, rather, because a whole array of crucial political possibilities are *missing* from the space constituted by the divergent work of Dean and Healy. We are asked, it seems, to choose: be an *anti-capitalist* revolutionary, building organized political power by marching arm-in-arm with the unified force of the new Communist Party; or be a *post-capitalist* ethical subject, eschewing critique, disavowing capitalism, and strengthening emerging communal practices through engaged research. This false choice, I will argue, is partially sustained by the particular direction of post-capitalist theory since its emergence, and a more potent and compelling revolutionary politics can be opened up through increased engagement with two key domains of praxis: *cross-sector organizing* and *the critique of capital*.

Following J.K. Gibson-Graham's powerful “deflating of capitalism's phallus” in *The End of Capitalism* (1996), one could trace at least three possible projects to follow: first, a generative exploration of the diverse forms of actually-existing livelihood that “capitalocentrism” works to obscure; second, a conceptualization of ways in which these scattered sites might be linked with each other and with broader social movements to constitute synergies and build collective power; and third, the reconstruction of a radical critique of “the-enemy-formerly-known-as-capitalism” in the aftermath of its deconstruction. All

three projects are present in Healy's paper, yet the latter two are mostly submerged, appearing more as suggestive glimmers than as substantive engagements.

The project of identifying and strengthening diverse economic practices has, of course, been robustly and effectively taken up in *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Gibson-Graham 2006) and in other work by members of the Community Economies Collective (CEC) and their collaborators (e.g., Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013; Roelvink, St. Martin, and Gibson-Graham forthcoming). Building on this, Healy (2015) compellingly argues that communism should be viewed as *immanent* to the social field, not just in the form of a desire for future revolution, but in the form of myriad, concrete, continually-negotiated ethical practices of being-in-common. Accounts of capitalism as a systemic totality (such as one finds in Dean) render these sites of communist becoming invisible or marginal. Transformative work must therefore involve both a vigilance against the exclusions of capitalocentrism and a “militant biopolitical research” (Healy 2015, 11) aimed at composing the visibility and viability of communist proliferation. This is a crucial political moment, rendering revolution possible in the here-and-how.

Such opening of previously-marginalized sites and practices is primarily where post-capitalist work inspired by Gibson-Graham has focused, at least until recently. Indeed, Gibson-Graham's preference for a “punctiform” ontology of economic practices “scattered over a landscape” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 2), along with her emphasis on transformative strategies of “ubiquity rather than unity” (2006, xxiv), may have produced the unintended effect of steering attention *away* from the kinds of organized, cross-sector linkages and network-building strategies that solidarity economy activists have seen as crucial to effective movements for revolutionary change (e.g., Mance 2010; Satgar 2014). Healy's paper gestures toward such work of communist “conjugation,” and his own engagement with solidarity economy organizing reflects a wider, emerging direction of research by members of the CEC (e.g., Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013; Miller 2013; Safri 2013; Shear 2014; Gibson-Graham 2014). Yet Healy's suggestion that we must “politically organize around communism” (2015, 10) remains undeveloped, eclipsed by a continued

emphasis on the role of performative research in strengthening particular sites of communal practice. I find some resonance with Dean here, despite our significant divergences: “good ideas” disconnected from militant practice and organization *do* risk becoming “possibilities without possibility” (Dean 2015, 1) relative to wider aspirations for revolutionary change. This does not at all imply the necessity of the Party, but Healy's lack of explicit engagement with militant movement politics leaves the door wide open for Dean's singular strategy to claim the space of serious, collective organizing. A thousand possibilities exist between the dangerously-liberal image of proliferating points and the dangerously-authoritarian image of the Party, and I want to encourage Healy and other fellow post-capitalist scholar-activists to continue publicly pushing our work toward such openings.

My second concern, regarding a post-deconstructive critique of capitalism, is oriented less toward a lack of emphasis than toward an apparent *resistance*. For Gibson-Graham, critique entraps its agents in a relationship of melancholic dependence on that which they claim to resist, and entails a paradoxical effect of overly-confident judgment and resentful powerlessness (2006, 5). Healy appears to agree. Yet despite the crucial caution that such an analysis offers for oppositional activists, it all-too-easily becomes another binary formulation: one either practices a “politics of denunciation” (Ferguson 2009, cited in Healy 2015) or a “politics of possibility” (Gibson-Graham 2006, xiv). But why must we choose? Michael Hardt, quoted by Healy, suggests that we can construct a “form of biopolitical militancy that has the power to struggle *against* the life we are given and to *make* a new life” (Hardt 2010, 34, emphasis mine). Can we not construct forms of action and subjectivity in which both critique and experiment, rage and hope, opposition and possibility, co-exist and even co-constitute one another? Might we not find, in fact, that many successful communist practices are fortified by precisely this potent mix? How can we ward off “capitalist sorcery” (Pignarre and Stengers 2011) and protect precious spaces of resistance and creation without a careful—though always-dangerous—account of our enemy?

The absence of a critical reformulation has rendered the post-capitalist project vulnerable to caricature and dismissal as a naïve, voluntarist reformism that sits comfortably with capitalist modes of diversity and lifestyle choice (as in Dean 2012; 2015). Moreover, and more crucially, people for whom a “critical stance” constitutes an *embodied response* to oppression and violence may not connect with a post-capitalism that avoids oppositional politics or critique (Shear 2014). One cannot reduce the coercive and often mutually-reinforcing “imperatives” of accumulation, competition, and dispossession to discursive performances, “scattered sites,” or even to a particular set of arrangements regarding the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus (Gibson-Graham 2006, 198). We might turn, instead, to the work of Massimo De Angelis (2007), for whom capital is not a “system” or a “whole,” but rather an always-vulnerable and incomplete social *process* of colonization and discipline. Revolutionary struggle, in this view, can be situated in myriad, proliferating movements that enact life-affirming value relations both *outside* and *against* the values of capital (2007, 30). Eugene Holland's (2011) notion of the “slow motion general strike” is formulated in a similar spirit. One does not choose between opposition and creation, but continually articulates sites of organized resistance and noncapitalist livelihood practice in ways that undermine the viability of capital's reproduction in favor of other assemblages. Revolutionary success here will neither be constructed by a singular “party” nor built on the mere proliferation of practices: myriad, autonomous, organized connections of anti-capitalist and post-capitalist practice can serve to render each other increasingly viable, potent, and durable. This is, at least, a proposition worthy of serious and sustained engagement.

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