Community Economy:

Ontology, Ethics, and Politics for Radically-Democratic Economic Organizing

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Abstract

Far from naming a singular postcapitalist politics, J.K. Gibson-Graham's notion of "the community economy" is a polyvalent term that condenses a number of distinct elements. Distinguishing between these, and exploring their connections and tensions, can clarify and strengthen what has become one of the most compelling contemporary attempts to develop a radically-democratic approach to imagining life beyond capitalism. In this paper, I read Gibson-Graham's "community economy" as if through a prism, refracting it into three constituent elements—ontology, ethics, and politics—and placing them in conversation with one another via comparative explorations of both "community economy" and "solidarity economy" as contemporary articulations for radically-democratic economic organizing. In teasing out their tensions and complementarities, I hope to contribute toward the further development of community economies theory as a set of conceptual tools for engaging and strengthening the complex ethical and political work of building noncapitalist livelihoods.

Introduction

J.K. Gibson-Graham's (1996) *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* offers a powerful

challenge to discourses asserting capitalism's unity, ubiquity and inevitability. Affirming the

impossibility of the totalizing capitalist dominance around which many radical imaginaries have

oriented themselves, her deconstructive project seeks to "empty, fragment, decenter and open the

economy, liberating discourses of economy and society from capitalism's embrace" (Gibson-Graham

1996, 45). This is a doubly-anticapitalist project, aimed at both the relations of exploitation that the

term "capitalism" purports to name, and at the ways in which this naming so easily becomes an

obstacle to imagining and enacting other modes of economy. How might we engage in opposition to capitalism without instating ourselves as its necessary subordinate? How might we enact viable projects of noncapitalist economic construction in the absence of singular visions or blueprints? In sum, how are we to build radically-democratic economies beyond capitalism by means that are themselves radically-democratic?

These questions are taken up in *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Gibson-Graham 2006a), where the language of the "community economy" attempts to name an economic politics that simultaneously honors the deconstructive ethic of The End of Capitalism and responds to its call for an affirmative "lived project of socialist construction" (Gibson-Graham 1996, 251). "Community economy" is a fertile concept, embraced by an array of activist-scholars seeking to make visible diverse economic processes and to performatively strengthen oft-marginalized modes of noncapitalist livelihood.[1] The concept has yet to be robustly theorized, however, beyond the work of Gibson-Graham herself, as a normative ontological framework for a noncapitalist economic politics and a tool for radically-democratic economic *organizing*. It is to such a task that I hope to contribute.

This paper consists of two parts. First, I engage in a detailed re-presentation of Gibson-Graham's concept of community economy. This reading proceeds as if through a prism, refracting community economy into three interrelated "moments"—ontology, ethics and politics. Distinguishing between these, and exploring their connections and tensions, can serve to clarify and strengthen the concept and to open key questions regarding the kinds of organizing strategies that might be pursued when different moments are emphasized. If, along the way, I reconstitute the concept of community economy differently than Gibson-Graham herself, it will not be in the form of a critique so much as a creative collaboration. I take her articulation not as a definitive position to be defended, but as a provisional thought to be explored, reworked, and mobilized.

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[1]   For examples of such projects, see the "Diverse Economies in Geography: Online Bibliography," http://phg.sagepub.com/content/suppl/2008/06/02/0309132508090821.DC2/Diverse_Economies_Online_Bibliography.pdf

In the second part of the paper, I use this elaborated theorization of community economy to look at two modes of radically-democratic economic organizing: "community economy" as itself a (potential) counterhegemonic discourse, and the "solidarity economy" as an emerging effort to construct transformative economic networks. In the encounter between these, I explore a critical tension. On one hand, the introduction of positivity—normative or structural content—into economic politics risks "knowing too much" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 8) about transformative possibility and thus enacting dangerous exclusions and foreclosing potential becomings. On the other hand, such problematic positivity may be strategically necessary in order to constitute a project capable of "convening...many different forms of economic difference [and] constituting a chain of equivalence through new acts of identification" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 78). I conclude by arguing against any either/or choice, and for the necessity of keeping each of the three moments of community economy alive in on-the-ground projects of noncapitalist construction.

Three Moments of Community Economy

While not theorized as such by Gibson-Graham, "community economy" can be read in her work as a polyvalent term that condenses three conceptually distinct, yet interrelated, moments. I will call these "CE1", "CE2" and "CE3." To summarize, CE1 is the "ontological moment" of community economy, an essentially negative and un-fixable space characterised by a sharing of the very impossibility of fully capturing or mastering the nature of our being-together. CE2 is the "moment of ethical exposure," the affirmation of a demand to render visible and contestable the dynamics and consequences (and thus responsibilities) of our interrelationships. CE3 is, finally, the "moment of politics" in which the inevitable positivity of our collective ethical negotiations is made explicit and becomes a site of connection, exclusion, struggle and active transformation.

The strength of the community economy concept is to articulate these three moments together. Neither alone would be sufficient to introduce radical contingency and possibility into both"economy" and "community," while at the same time offering a pathway for affirming new projects of economic sociality. Indeed, these moments are fundamentally *movements*, animated by dynamic relations of opening and closure, negativity and positivity, emptiness and substance. While we can, in some sense, view these movements in terms of their progressive degrees of closure around positivities (as their numerical sequence would imply), they are perhaps more usefully conceived as a "fractal" relation (Capra 1997, 138) playing across multiple nested scales—the ontological itself being a site of ethical negotiation and a closure, however provisional, around a conceptual positivity with political implications.[2] These complex movements are all present in Gibson-Graham's work, taking on multiple roles and valences. Their differential emphasis, and the question of who should participate in their various enactments (and how), makes all the difference for economic politics and organizing practice.

CE1: The Ontological Moment

CE1 marks a crucial ontological starting point for the concept of community economy, though it resists any singular sense of ontology that functions as a determining force or law. Gibson-Graham is clear that her ontological assertions are tentative, incomplete, and experimental. They are "performative practices for other worlds" (Gibson-Graham 2008), contingent tools for thinking, feeling and acting that are always engaged amidst a commitment "to question the claims of truth and the universality that accompany any ontological rigidity" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, xxxiii). Her stance is one of exploration, of "acting as a beginner...of refusing to extend diagnoses too widely or deeply" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 8). This holding-back should not be taken as a recipe for paralysis, for it is

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[2]   Even a negative ontology must be seen as an ethical and political choice, and thus examined in terms of that which might be foreclosed or enabled by such (paradoxical) positivity. Thanks to Yahya Madra for pointing this out.

precisely the acknowledged uncertainty at the heart of Gibson-Graham's approach that animates her dedication to multiplying forms of action while remaining attentive to the vulnerable work of collective learning and self-transformation.

As a provisional ontology, then, CE1 is composed of two distinct theorizations—*economy* and *community*—and is brought to life by their mutual encounter. Gibson-Graham's ontology of the economic is one of radical and irreducible difference at the heart of our constitutive interrelations. It is articulated primarily through the Althusserian concept of overdetermination, "an understanding of identities as continually and differentially constituted rather than as pre-existing their contexts or having an invariant core" (Gibson-Graham 1996, 16). The economic figures here as an "open-ended discursive construct" organizing a vast, heterogeneous field of relations—a space out of which order must be made (and always partially) rather than simply "found" (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003, 152). Even the "diverse economies" framework, which names and maps many positivities of economic practice, is clearly meant as a non-definitive, performative tool, limited purposefully in scope. As Gibson-Graham writes, "We are not overtly concerned with the chaotic and non-comprehensive 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'..." (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 60). This rupturing of any notion of a "real" economy is at the heart of Gibson-Graham's political project to "dis-order the capitalist economic landscape, to queer it and thereby dislocate capitalocentrism's hegemony"(Gibson-Graham 2006a, 77)—indeed, to dislocate any economic landscape that attempts to fix itself as the only possible reality. The economy of CE1 is perhaps the closest that an economic ontology might come to emptying itself of all essential content without rejecting the term "economic" itself.

CE1's similarly anti-essentialist ontology of community, drawn explicitly from the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, seeks to escape conventional notions that reduce community to a shared positive essence, a unity, or a project of fusion to be achieved. For Nancy, community cannot be made, gained,

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or lost, but is rather a condition of *being* itself: "Community is given to us with being and as being, well in advance of all our projects, desires and undertakings" (Nancy 1991, 35). This ontological community is not the sharing of a common set of characteristics, identities, or values—a "common-being"—but rather a "being-in-common," a sharing of the very limits of our commonality. The French verb *partager* indicates the dual meaning at work here: to divide and to share (Nancy 2000, 61). There is no one without another, and thus "being-with" is prior to all articulations of individual being (2000, 28); yet at the same time this being-with requires that we are separated or "spaced" (1991, 76), since to share an essence would be to merge and thus to undermine the possibility of our connection. Community, which is itself this paradoxical spacing/sharing, emerges only at its very limits—in our exposure to finitude, the death of ourselves and others, the fragile edges at which we both touch and disappear.

For Nancy, the project of "building community" all-too-easily slips into deciding what the positive nature of our togetherness can and should be. In attempting to make community into our own image, we turn each other into projects and thus open the possibility for violence and exclusion—what Nancy calls "the work of death" (1991, 17). Community, then, cannot be "a work" or a "project," made or realized through the implementation of a vision or collective aspiration (1991, 31). It is "exposed" (1991, 25), rather, only in the "unworking" of all such projects. Community "interrupts our being from a margin we do not control" (Nancy and ten Kate 2010, 6). It is the disruption of any positivity that seeks closure around a common essence, or that seeks to institute human mastery. Such thinking of community cannot be operationalized in any concrete form. It arises only as a kind of ontological anarchy, a trickster at the heart of all politics, interrupting myths, undoing certainties and opening up closures.

What does it mean for Gibson-Graham to combine an experimental ontology of radical economic difference with one of unworked community? Economy can no longer be seen as a space of

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essentially-common measure or of the circulation of ultimately commensurable values. And yet its presence reminds us that Nancy's "sharing" must always be enacted through the ongoing embodied constitution of our livelihoods. Being-in-common can neither fully embrace nor fully ignore the material interdependencies that "economy" gestures toward. Community economy thus names the desire to place a permanent disruption at the heart of "the commerce of being-together" (Nancy 2000, 74), a force of unsettling that continually brings us back to the always problematic—and potentially transformable—nature of our institutions. "We must keep in mind," writes Gibson-Graham, "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" (2006b, vx, fn7, emphasis mine).

CE1, in Gibson-Graham's work, animates both a crucial resistance and a powerful possibility. On one side, it radically resists the closures that come with every positive economic articulation:

> ...this means resisting equating community economic development *only* with growing the local capitalist economy *or* with attempts to establish "small-is-beautiful" green self-sufficiency *or* with achieving community self-determination through promoting homegrown, locally oriented community business. Whether explicitly or implicitly, these conceptions of the community economy draw on normative ideals of the community as a fullness and a positivity...Not only is economic difference suppressed (if only lightly), but any *ethic* of being-in-common, of coexistence with the other, is relegated to a remnant. (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 86)

The other side of this suppression of positivity is Gibson-Graham's commitment to proliferating spaces of possibility. "The association of a community with *being* that is already known precludes the *becoming* of new and as-yet unthought ways of being" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 85). It is the unworking of common-being—what in Lacanian parlance might be called "traversing the fantasy" (Stavrakakis 2003, 58; Byrne and Healy 2006, 246)— that makes transformation possible at multiple levels, from economic institutions and norms to the level of subjectivity itself. Indeed, if change demands that we

undo the very conditions of possibility that have enabled us to appear as particular desiring subjects, then a practice of unworking at the level of affective investment and subjective identity must be central to any radically-transformative economic politics (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 77).

The ontology of CE1 suggests that something like "the unworker" may be a crucial role to acknowledge within transformative political-economic work. Who or what takes on such a role within a given collectivity? How does one enact or facilitate a simultaneously loving and disruptive gesture, an affirmative negation, and how does one negotiate such gestures from others? Through what practices of collective receptivity, vulnerability and courage might we remain open to the crucial yet destabilizing force of unwork amidst the ever-present demand to produce positive implementations of collectivity? In radical democracy's terms, how might we "institute contestation" (Tønder and Thomassen 2005, 6) or "institutionalize the lack" (Byrne and Healy 2006, 243), recognizing and cultivating a dynamic and generative instability at the heart of even our most solid convictions and institutions?

CE2: The Ethical Moment

The moment of CE2 is a movement toward a positivity that CE1 would not permit, yet, nonetheless enables. At the heart of CE2 lies an elegant "meta-ethic": community economies arise whenever our interdependence is exposed for negotiation or contestation. Whereas CE1 undoes the positivity of all formulations, CE2 introduces a preliminary affirmation: a demand for the collective exposure of the very *question* of ethics. The movement from CE1 enables us to "make explicit the sociality that is already present" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 88) and thus to intervene at its moment of specification. "In this communal space," writes Gibson-Graham, "individual and collective subjects negotiate questions of livelihood and interdependence and (re)construct themselves in the process"

(2006b, x). Precisely how, and with what normative content, this negotiation is accomplished is not specified; in CE2, only the space of negotiation itself is exposed. Thus, "what interdependence might mean, how it might look in any particular setting...are not questions [we] can answer in the abstract" (Gibson-Graham 2005, 121).

This meta-normative move of CE2 functions, in part, to sustain a critique of capitalism, for amidst the ontological condition of being-in-common that can neither be produced nor lost, a distinction can be made between those social relations which *obscure* our essential sociality and those which render it explicit. Capitalist relations of generalized exchange render commensurable that which cannot be measured or compared, instituting a common-being that eclipses the irreducible difference of being-in-common. As Nancy writes, following Marx, "capital negates community because it places above it the identity and the generality of production and products: the operative communion and general communication of works" (1991, 75). Capitalism, as a "socially imploded generality" is opposed to precisely the kind of "socially exposed particularity" (Nancy 1991, 74) that CE2 seeks to name and enable.

Both Nancy and Marx, writes Gibson-Graham, "point to what is for us a truly salient distinction, between whether interdependence is recognized and acted upon or whether it is obscured or perhaps denied. The distinction between implicit or effaced being-with and explicit being-with is thus the keystone of our counterhegemonic project of 'differently politicizing' the economy." (2006a, 84). This is an ethic of commoning, counterposed against an ethic of uncommoning that alienates singular plural beings from the means of ethical negotiation and political production. And yet this critical intervention remains posed in profoundly open terms. First, it refrains from constructing any kind of structural critique (e.g., the inevitability of crisis or the necessary drive to accumulate) that might smuggle closures into an open space of ethics. Second, it does not specify what kinds of values or norms are decided upon in the space of negotiation, nor what processes and institutions might

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effectively enact them. It simply demands that such a space be constructed and defended at every possible juncture, and performatively facilitates such work.

A key element of this critical and disclosive performativity is Gibson-Graham's framework of "ethical coordinates" (2006a, 88–97). As a form of "weak theory" not unlike the diverse economies framework in its aspiration (2006a, 71), the ethical coordinates are meant to partially and provisionally map key dimensions of an "ethical praxis of being-in-common" (2006a, 88). They enable exploration of the ways in which collectivities negotiate questions around what is necessary for survival, how surplus is appropriated and distributed, how consumption practices relate to questions of social surplus, and how commons are shared, cared-for and defended. These coordinates have been used by activist-scholars to analyze collective ethical negotiations in diverse economic spaces from tenants-rights organizations (Graham and Cornwell 2010) and worker cooperative networks (Cornwell 2011) to community food economies (Cameron, Gibson, and Hill 2012) and reciprocal human interactions with the more-than-human world (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009). Beyond analytical uses, such coordinates—and others yet to be named—might also enable those struggling toward other kinds of economic relationships to identify potential points of intervention that would otherwise remain obscure.

The "meta-ethic" of exposure and the ethical coordinates can be situated, along with a third dimension addressing power, as a series of key internal elements of CE2. In her article "An Ethics of the Local" (2003), Gibson-Graham articulates three principles that can be transposed into this context: "recognize particularity and contingency" (2003, 52), "respect difference and otherness" (2003, 53) and "cultivate capacity" (2003, 54). The recognition of particularity and contingency—taken in its most radical sense—points toward the meta-ethical demand to expose the possibility of ethics (and thus politics). This is the principle which gives power to CE2's critique of capitalism and its opening toward ethical possibility. Second, respecting difference and otherness is the dimension in which the meta-ethic is enacted by making-visible multiple sites and pathways of negotiation. This is the work of the

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coordinates. Finally, the principle of cultivating capacity names the crucial dimension of power—that is, the question of our (profoundly varied) capacities to act in spaces of negotiation that have been exposed, and to participate in struggles to expose them.

It is perhaps this third dimension, or, more precisely, a perceived lack of direct engagement with it, which has been the greatest source of resistance to Gibson-Graham's work (see, for example, Glassman 2003; Kelly 2005). Yet it is also this dimension which is most difficult and dangerous to engage in the abstract. As Julie Graham often warned us, we must be deeply wary of placing pre-specified notions of power into our theories. Power is dynamic and slippery, and while patterns and habits of differential power relations are clearly at play in our world, the risk of theorizing these as structural—as determined "beforehand" in some strong sense—is that we performatively reinforce that which we seek to dismantle and thereby close off possibilities for unexpected transformation. It is thus not a matter of denying power, but rather of focusing on the cultivation of capacities instead of on the ways in which such capacities might fail or fall short. This is a key dimension of the radically-democratic impulse in Gibson-Graham: the theorist does not proclaim what is or is not possible, but rather aligns herself with those who are struggling to build other worlds and offers enabling tools to sustain and enhance this work.

CE3: The Moment of Politics

If CE1 is the moment in which all positivity is suspended and disrupted, and CE2 is the moment in which it is opened as a question, then CE3 is the moment in which positivity is collectively *enacted*. Despite Gibson-Graham's emphasis on "the dangers of posing a positivity, a normative representation of the community economy" (2006a, 98), she clearly recognizes its necessity for any effective economic politics. Her analysis of the Mondragón worker cooperative complex is a case in point:

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> There are a number of keys to the success of the experimental development pathway initiated in Mondragón. At the core of regional economic transformation are a set of cooperative ethical principles including open admission, democratic organization, the sovereignty of labour, the instrumental and subordinate nature of capital, participatory management, payment solidarity and inter-cooperation. These principles guide all economic decisions. (Gibson-Graham 2010, 230)

Mondragón does not, however, constitute a set of "model" principles to be universalized in a theory of postcapitalist politics. While Gibson-Graham is willing to celebrate the inspiration that such closures around a positivity may provide, they remain the principles of *Mondragón*, contingently articulated and continually struggled-over in that specific place by those specific people (2006a, 126). The key to CE3 is that moments of ethical decision—the institution of community economies—are at once necessary, dangerous, and always particular.

Gibson-Graham follows Laclau and Mouffe (2001) in understanding the political as an ongoing struggle for hegemony in a social terrain that can never be finally closed. Amidst a field of radical difference, characterized by the continual unworking of all fixities (CE1), we struggle nonetheless to institute and stabilize particular regimes of meaning, value and collective action. The political "involves the continual struggle...to close the totality and stem the infinite processes of signification within language" (Gibson-Graham 1996, 55). The power of political action lies in the extent to which it simultaneously succeeds in exposing the contestability of previously-enacted institutions and in partially covering over its own contingency (Laclau 1990, 34). This is the institution of hegemony, and the struggle to re-open such closure and institute an alternative is the project of counterhegemony. Such work proceeds via processes of articulation, by which multiple struggles and identities are linked through shared (empty) signifiers or "nodal points"(Laclau 1996). In this view, "neither absolute fixity nor absolute non-fixity is possible" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 111). Thus even as CE1 serves to disrupt and unsettle all attempts at closure, CE3 reminds us that these attempts are nonetheless necessary if we

are to participate in the work of collective political construction.

For Gibson-Graham, there is no doubt that political projects to institute positivities are crucial and productive. "For becoming to be supported and nurtured, some form and substance is required" (2006a, xxxvi). Beyond her affirmation of Mondragón, for example, she describes "the language of the social/solidarity economy" as "an important mobilizing tool, allowing this new movement to demonstrate that they are an essential part of the Quebec economy" (2010, 231). Gibson-Graham's work is indeed teeming with examples of CE3. From the multiple forms of communal labor in Jagna (Philippines) to the social justice agenda of the Anti-Displacement Project in Springfield, Massachusetts (now the Alliance to Develop Power), we see an emphasis on moving from CE1 and CE2 to projects of CE3 that work at the level of explicit values and visions—"fixing new 'dispositional patterns of desire'" that animate concrete alternative economic practices (2006a, 162). The question for Gibson-Graham is clearly not one of positivity versus its total refusal, but rather how to negotiate the tricky dance between these crucial demands.

The specification of positive content named by CE3 is no doubt as dangerous as it is productive, for such closure immediately becomes a potential force of ossification and exclusion. The ongoing movement between CE1, CE2 and CE3 is thus crucial. How do we step boldly and affirmatively into a powerfully-articulated political project while at the same time holding open the space of ethical decision and the emptiness that constitutes its possibility? Gibson-Graham negotiates this tension with two strategies. First, she keeps the three moments of community economy in constant play, affirming positive practice yet always returning to an explicit recognition of its dangers. Her discussion of solidarity economy organizing, for example, is supportive yet riddled with a self-conscious caution: "This is a broad movement, the list of principles is very long, and most of them are things we support, albeit in the unquestioning fashion of radicals who know the direction 'we all' should take" (2006a, 98). Secondly, Gibson-Graham refuses to endorse any singular set of CE3 principles. While she indicates

toward CE3 as a necessary moment, this is not where her work seeks to directly intervene. "The normative vision that might guide development interventions," she asserts, "will be grounded in the specificities of place" (2010, 230).

CE3 cannot be decided beforehand, by Gibson-Graham or by any other scholar, outside of the concrete networks of relations, struggles and possibilities out of which a given process of articulation emerges. Julie Graham did not refrain from engaging in positive articulations of CE3—her involvement with the Valley Alliance of Worker Cooperatives in Western Massachusetts is a case in point—but this was work to be done *collectively*, in the embodied exposure and ethical complexity of a particular community. This is, perhaps, where Gibson-Graham's most radical challenge to Left academia lies: she asks us if our desires for "strong theory" are not sometimes means for evading the hard, messy and humble work of building transformative relationships, organizations, and movements in our actual places. She challenges us to focus our creative energies on constructing *weak theory*—theory that "refuses to know too much" about what is or isn't possible—so that so that our organizing, and our commitment to face-to-face negotiation and transformation, can be *strong*.

Practicing Economic Politics

What, then, might an economic politics that takes seriously the interplay between the three moments of CE actually look like? How might this refracted notion of community economy help us to strengthen and more effectively negotiate complex practices of economic organizing? Here I explore two pathways—one somewhat hypothetical and the other already-existing—that might set a broader problematic of radically-democratic economic politics into motion. The first is a mobilization of "community economy" as itself a "nodal point" of articulation for a unified alternative economic organizing project. Such a possibility is strongly hinted at in Gibson-Graham's work, but not

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elaborated. The second pathway is that of the "solidarity economy" movement, particularly strong in Latin America, Quebec and parts of western Europe, and gathering strength more recently in the United States and Asia. I focus here on some key questions and challenges raised by an encounter between these two modes of organizing.

Community Economy as a Counterhegemonic Project

Thus far I have sidestepped an important dimension in Gibson-Graham's concept of community economy. In one sense, the term is mobilized in the three ways that I have described above. In another, the term stands as a tentative proposal for "an alternative fixing of economic identity around a new nodal point" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 78). This is to say that the community economy could itself become a "political project to unify [the] discursive terrain" of multiple diverse economies, challenging the hegemony of capitalocentric social formations:

> Articulating the multiple, heterogeneous sites of struggle, such a discourse could
> resignify *all* economic transactions and relations, capitalist and noncapitalist, in terms
> of their sociality and interdependence, and their ethical participation in being-in-
> common as part of a 'community economy'. (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 97)

Here we see an aspiration to collapse the meta-ethical moment of CE2 into CE3's moment of politics and to pose a *political articulation* around the question of the exposure and negotiation of social interdependence. Such a move would politicize—and thus make explicit the potential antagonisms within—the Nancian distinction between "socially imploded generality" and "socially exposed particularity." A community economy would be built by those who seek to sustain and struggle for spaces in which interdependence is visible and collectively negotiated, opposing processes of uncommoning or enclosure in all their forms.

What does this look like as an organizing project? One might be tempted to imagine the

formation of a coalition identified with "ethical exposure," oriented around a commitment only to the question of ethics itself. Indeed, Gibson-Graham's aspiration is toward some kind of substantive linking, asking "how do we multiply, amplify, and connect these different activities?" (2006a, 80). Yet her counterhegemonic articulation of community economy is not meant to suggest the construction of anything resembling an organizationally-coherent movement. Her preferred theory of change is based, rather, on a "feminist political imaginary" inspired by "the complex intermixing of alternative discourses, shared language, embodied practices, self-cultivation, emplaced actions, and global transformation associated with second-wave feminism" (2006b, xxvii). Transformation occurs, in this view, through "ubiquity rather than unity" (2006a, xxiv), in "a vast set of disarticulated 'places'...related analogically rather than organizationally and connected through webs of signification" (2006b, xxvii).

Community economy as a counterhegemonic discourse might thus link diverse projects of ethical exposure and negotiation "emotionally and semiotically rather than primarily through organizational ties" (2006b, xxiii). Is this not how capitalocentric hegemony was, in fact, established? While institutional articulation has clearly been essential for the rise of such a force, haven't the emotional and semiotic dimensions of capitalist discourse also been crucial in rendering noncapitalist practices, and potential spaces of collective creation and resistance, effectively invisible? Perhaps. Yet capitalist hegemonic articulations have been robustly positive in their content, never shying away from the common-being that CE1 demands we unwork, or from closing the ethical spaces that CE2 demands we open. Can the near-emptiness of a community economy meta-ethic generate the kind of identificatory power that a strong nodal point requires? Is there enough "family resemblance" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 179) between various instances of community economy (CE2) to enable politically-effective connections to emerge across vast difference? These are questions to which a solidarity economy approach might answer "no."

Solidarity Economy as a Counterhegemonic Project

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The language of "solidarity economy" (*economía solidaria* or *économie solidaire*) took root in both Latin America and France in the early 1980s as a way to name, connect and strengthen an emerging host of diverse alternative economic practices and institutions . Over the past thirty years, this articulation has developed into an international movement, linking thousands of initiatives across five continents via the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy (*Red Intercontinental de Promoción de la Economía Social Solidária*, or RIPESS) and animating numerous other formal and informal networks and associations (Arruda 2009; Miller 2010). The solidarity economy movement is another attempt to establish a counterhegemonic "nodal point" around which a creative antagonism to neoliberal capitalist economic relations can be constructed (Esteves 2011, 47). This does not mean that all participants see themselves in terms of an anti-essentialist politics of radical democracy; rather, it points to the sense in which the solidarity economy movement lacks a single set of shared ontological presumptions or analytical frameworks that fill the term with necessary positive content. The name itself functions as an empty signifier, filled only with the partial and always-contested positivity that is granted by ongoing processes of articulation by and among the initiatives themselves (Dacheux and Goujon 2011; Arruda 2008; Lemaître and Helmsing 2011).

If there is a shared understanding among the diverse manifestations of this movement, it is that a "solidarity economy" is connected by shared *values* (Arruda 2008; Fonteneau et al. 2010; Lewis 2007). In contrast to Gibson-Graham's radical openness around the specific moralities to be enacted in a community economy, solidarity economy efforts embrace the moment of CE3 and seek to specify the normative commitments that their participants should or must aspire to. Solidarity economy, says Carola Reintjas (2003), "makes economy accountable with ethical standards." Or, as a statement from the Spanish organization SELBA states, solidarity economy "does not seek a singular model for all cultures and societies, but rather limits itself to developing minimal principles that would gather

together those economic models (different and adapted to each culture) that would want to call themselves 'solidary'" (SELBA 2006, translation mine).

"Who's in, and who's out" is thus a central question for solidarity economy organizing. If we are to build a movement linking together multiple actors across a diverse economic landscape to create synergies and collective power, with whom will we connect? The movement thus articulates itself through a variety of ethical criteria. In Brazil, for example, a "solidarity economy enterprise" is defined as a collective and self-managed (worker-controlled) institution (FBES 2012). The values of SolidarityNYC, working to build "an economy worth occupying" in New York City, are both broader and more specific: "the solidarity economy meets our needs (everything from financial services to food) by utilizing values of justice, sustainability, cooperation, and democracy" (SolidarityNYC 2012). In both cases, the radically-open democratic moment of CE2 is effectively closed, and negotiation is shifted to the CE3 terrain of how we interpret and enact these values. To be sure, the solidarity economy movement internalizes significant difference regarding which values are prioritized by specific networks and what these mean in practice, and is thus animated in part by a constitutive openness and antagonism characteristic of the community economy (Byrne and Healy 2006, 251). Nonetheless, these terms—and the particular positive substance of how a given movement in a given place and time defines them—are required as points of articulation.

As the unworking force of CE1 reminds us, these are dangerous closures. Might "shared values" become a tacit demand toward a common-being that risks an exclusionary moralism? Will "solidarity" become the righteous work of vanguard activists seeking to purge the movement of impurities? Will the work of those whose values are not posed in Leftist terms—but are fruitful sites for transformation nonetheless—be excluded or made invisible in this kind of project? Will possibilities for unexpected connections be closed off in the name of coherent organizing and unified morality? These are crucial questions for any values-based project of radical change.

At the very same time, however, it is clear that the shared values of solidarity economy constitute potentially powerful tools for political articulation. The core theory of change that is adopted (at least implicitly) by most solidarity economy efforts is one in which articulation must take strong material and institutional form, and shared values are a key hinge. This means "weaving collaborative networks among groups, movements and organisations through which to coordinate and share," (Mance 2010, 66), and specifically constructing concrete relations of collaborative production, transaction, consumption and surplus reinvestment that can constitute a growing "outside" to capitalist relations. Moreover, such organizing aspires to connect an emerging alternative sphere of livelihood with other social movements actively contesting relations of oppression, exploitation and enclosure: "What makes it original is the capacity of solidarity economy to constantly articulate the economic and the political dimensions... to resist and to construct, to contest and to propose, and to link together criticism of globalization with practices of economic citizenship in daily life" (Alliance for a Responsible Plural and United World 2002).

Community Economy/Solidarity Economy

Community economy and solidarity economy clearly carry different implications for the kinds of organizing they might generate. The approach of community economy politicizes CE2, seeking to connect with a broad and open array of people and practices, and works to expose already-present relations of interdependence to collective negotiation in anticipation that this work will generate a different landscape of possibility. Solidarity economy, instead, begins with a strong but negotiable list of values, identifies resonant institutions and practices, and convenes them in transformative economic networks. What can these projects learn from one another? What, in their encounter, might each become?

First, can the open meta-ethics of CE2—embraced by a counterhegemonic community economy politics—enable the kind of convergence and organization necessary to transform the institutional conditions of viability for another economy? Or does this kind of action *require* the very closure that CE2 seeks to avoid and that solidarity economy, in some sense, embraces? At the same time, how can we pursue a strong normative politics without closing off possibilities for new and unexpected becomings? As we have seen, CE1 and CE2 call for a solidarity economy approach to be profoundly wary of its tendencies toward exclusion. What practices might solidarity economy organizers adopt to help challenge the emergent forms of common-being that are so readily called forth by a politics of "solidarity"? Who are the "unworkers" within these movements, what unwork do they do, and how is this unworking cared for and welcomed amidst its destabilizing effects? On the other side, at what point must a politics of CE2 risk introducing stronger (CE3) normativity into its formulation? Is it even possible for such an open politics to hold its ground without some tacit endorsement of values beyond exposed negotiation? What practices might enable community economy activists to traverse the space of decision and enter into perilous normative terrain without losing their ontological lifeline to CE1?

Second, can the counterhegemonic politics of both community economy and solidarity economy open themselves to other models of power and economic transformation? Gibson-Graham's articulation of a feminist political imaginary might challenge solidarity economy organizers to explore less "organized" modes of connection and to humble their aspirations to link all projects together into "one big network." Meanwhile, solidarity economy's emphasis on the importance of constructing new material conditions of viability for alternative economic practices through concrete connections might challenge community economy articulations to explore theories of change beyond ubiquity, and perhaps even to challenge the limits of the analogy between feminist and radical economic movements. How can a community economies approach—without asserting more positivity at the moment of CE3 —address the need to develop stabilized networks of synergistic exchange and social movement bases

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for contesting and transforming broader institutional and policy contexts? Is this, in fact, a place where community economy as a *nodal point* reaches its limits and must be supplemented by something like solidarity economy? Might we see these two nodal points as holding an important and productive tension in terms of their abilities to intervene in distinct ways in a transformative economic politics?

The Work of Unworking: A Conclusion

I close by returning to the radical being-in-common of CE1, this paradoxical ontological anarchy that cannot be made directly into a program or a politics but nonetheless opens the possibility of politics itself. Such wisdom must, Gibson-Graham reminds us, be placed at the very heart of any project aspiring to the delightful arrogance of "changing the world." CE1 cannot by nature be "operationalized," and yet it "works" nonetheless by making visible the very movement of opening and closure, and by rendering this inevitable yet always-perilous origin point of ethics and politics *into an acknowledged space of negotiation and decision*. Knowing that we threaten the very heart of being-in-common by closing our politics around a normative vision of "community" or "solidarity"—and yet politics requires this of us—might enable a deepened responsibility and vigilance. When necessary certainties are disrupted by a recognition of the limits of our aspirations to make the world (and each other) into a "project," we may be humbled in ways that help us to re-orient and re-open ourselves to different pathways of becoming.

The closure of CE3 is an irreplaceable force of connection, and yet it requires the unworking of CE1, passing through the opening of CE2, to continually push it from an *intensive* to an *extensive* movement: a connecting that is never comfortable with itself, never too sure of its own content or too closed to the possibility of its own complicity in a constitutive violence it cannot see. CE 3 reminds us of a positivity that we cannot live without; CE2 of an exposure that must be relentlessly pursued; and

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CE1 that our fantasy of completion never arrives, and that this infinite delay is the paradoxical condition of possibility for the work of collectively imagining and enacting other modes of life. "Community without community," writes Nancy, "is to come, in the sense that it is always coming, endlessly, at the heart of every collectivity" (1991, 71). We might say, then, affirming Gibson-Graham's wisdom, that CE1 must always come "before" any of our attempts at exposing sites of negotiation or fixing nodal points, be they in the form of a community economy, a solidarity economy or something else—and in both senses of "before": as the constitutive unworking always already present in any work that we attempt in the world, and as the shared finitude—the possibility of partial connection—which is always before us (like it or not), yet-to-come.

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