

CHAPTER 4

Enacting a Postcapitalist Politics through the Sites and Practices of Life's Work

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Feminist, environmentalist, and social justice critiques of capitalism show us how much we need to “construct non-capitalistic ways to reproduce our life” (De Angelis 2012, xii). A postcapitalist politics (Gibson-Graham 2006b) attempts to do just that, through uncovering and enacting economic possibility in a diverse array of spaces and practices, where capitalist social relations are just one set among many. In this chapter, we bring together thinking on social reproduction and community economies to help us imagine a postcapitalist politics of life's work. We do so by exploring practices of life's work as they occur in homes, workplaces, and community spaces. These practices of provisioning, caring, and income generating can reproduce capitalist social relations, but they also “hold the possibility for altering, undermining and undoing these relations” (Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2003, 433).

How, then, can we imagine and enact a postcapitalist politics of social change through the practices and spaces of life's work? For Mitchell, Marston, and Katz the possibility of confounding reproduction and making something else becomes more concrete when glimmers of possibility in life's work are both consciously appropriated and reworked into new modes of practice (2003, 433). In this chapter, we use our research in Boston, Massachusetts (United States) and Xining, Qinghai (People's Republic of China [PRC]) to explore a postcapitalist politics that comes through recognizing and proliferating possibilities, intentionally appropriating them, and reworking modes of practice. Through these cases, we go on to argue that this occurs when life's workers negotiate surplus and necessity through caring, provisioning, and income-generating activities.

The paper unfolds in four parts. In the first section we discuss the politics of life's work and how a postcapitalist countertopography might enhance this project. In the second section we develop a framework for refracting the binaries of social reproduction and production through the lens of diverse economies. In the third section we introduce our case studies and describe the diverse economies and spatialities of life's work. And in the fourth section we analyze how the possibilities we have identified in life's work are being appropriated and negotiated in Xining and Boston.

Gathering and the Politics of Life's Work

Cindi Katz (2001a) has described the politics of social reproduction as having a “mushy constituency” that is dispersed across a variety of sites and practices. Gathering household and care practices together under the umbrella of social reproduction has served an important political purpose, highlighting the effects of capitalist production on life’s workers and showing how much capitalism depends on their caring and provisioning labor. The ubiquity and necessity of social reproduction means that these practices are well positioned to transform all of the social and material relations and spaces they touch, including capitalist relations of production (Katz 2001a, 2001b). Like Katz, J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006a, 2006b) finds a politics of ubiquity appealing as it can multiply the sites and opportunities for engaging in a decentralized politics of economic transformation. Taking inspiration from second wave feminism, she writes, “A feminist spatiality embraces not only a politics of ubiquity (its global manifestation) but a politics of place (its localization in places created, strengthened, defended, or transformed). This powerful imaginary gives us the perhaps unwarranted confidence that a place-based economic politics has the potential to be globally transformative” (Gibson-Graham 2006a, xxviii).

The concept of countertopography (Katz 2001b) brings together a politics of ubiquity and a politics of place. Countertopographies provide the grounds for connecting (and enhancing) local struggles over social reproduction happening in different parts of the world, and help us to “imagine a politics that maintains the distinctiveness of a place while recognizing that it is connected analytically to other places along contour lines that represent not elevation but particular relations to a social process (e.g., globalized capitalist relations of production)” (Katz 2001b, 1229).

While the concept has been used to trace the uneven impacts of neoliberal restructuring and global capitalism on households in different parts of the world, it can also be used to map out the postcapitalist possibilities of life’s work. We develop a postcapitalist countertopography of life’s work in order to map the sites and practices of social reproduction *already* enrolled in the maintenance and production of noncapitalist ways of being.

Our starting point in this postcapitalist countertopography is with the glimmers of possibility that Mitchell, Marston, and Katz provide: “If it is through these practices [of life’s work] that capitalism and other relations of domination and exploitation, together with their mobile subjects are produced, maintained, and remade then they hold the possibility for altering, undermining, and undoing these relations—for making new subjects. Glimmers of these possibilities spark through the minutia and magnificence of life’s work and are sometimes recog-

nized by life's workers" (2003, 433). How can we recognize, multiply, and connect these glimmers of possibility? In this chapter we draw on Gibson-Graham's diverse economies framework (2006b) to develop strategies for doing so. We recognize the precarity of life's work, but we are also interested in highlighting the possibilities for change already present in what people are doing to live well in the face of worsening ecological and economic crises. We draw on the diverse economies framework because it helps us understand how households sustain themselves (especially in times of crisis) by engaging in a diversity of capitalist, alternative, and noncapitalist economic practices (Smith 2002; Pavlovskaya 2004; Oberhauser 2005; Safri and Graham 2010; Stenning et al. 2010). And brings our attention to the "flash points" of ethical negotiations that take place over necessity and surplus in life's work (Gibson et al. 2001; Healy 2008; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013).

Community economies researchers have to some extent already established that life's work is full of economic diversity and possibility (Cameron 2000; Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003); our task here is to explore how these possibilities might strengthened and made more real through engaging with the ideas of social reproduction scholars (Katz 2001b; Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2003). At the same time we ask: what shift in perspective might be necessary for theorizing life and work beyond capitalism, in a way that builds on what is already happening? How can we begin recognizing the glimmers of possibility in life's work and their contribution to an economy that is already more than capitalist?

Reframing Life's Work

Possibilities proliferate when we reframe the economy as including much more than (capitalist) production and highlight the diversity of economic practices that are necessary for sustaining lives. The diverse economies framework was developed by J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006a) as part of her feminist critique of political economy. She emphasizes that the economy is made up of diverse types of economic transactions, labor, and enterprise, only some of which are capitalist. Gibson-Graham maps out the alternative capitalist and noncapitalist transactions, labor, and enterprise *already* in our midst. She does so without situating these practices in a teleology of capitalist becoming or subsuming them into modes of production.

Rather than using the full diverse economies framework (see Gibson-Graham 2006b, 71), we have focused on the diverse category of labor to describe the practices of life's work. Within this framing capitalist social relations are reduced to waged labor, and the relationship between different kinds of labor is an open question. Instead of knowing in advance that unpaid household

TABLE 4.1. Differentiating Labor

Labor Activity	Compensation		
	Waged	Alternative Paid	Unpaid
Provisioning	Provisioning work performed for a wage	Barter, exchange, in-kind payments for provisioning. Provisioning co-operatives.	Household cooking, gardening, preserving, and DIY labor.
Income Generating	Waged or salaried job in formal workplace. Waged or salaried job in a public place. Waged or salaried job in the home.	Partially paid through in-kind payments, paying oneself a wage, paying another household member a wage, cooperative payments and more.	Unpaid household labor that generates an income for someone else.
Caring	Care work performed for a wage in a formal workplace. Care work performed for a wage in a public place. Care work performed for a wage in the home.	Care work in exchange for something else, care work as part of a cooperative, extra care work that is only partially compensated.	Care work for one's own children or family, voluntary care work, extra care work performed in workplaces or public spaces, caring for the environment or community spaces.

Source: Authors, adapted from Gibson-Graham 2006a, 71.

labor and alternatively paid labors in the marketplace are somehow contributing to or enabling capitalist social relations, we view their relationship as a point of investigation for researchers and a point of ethical negotiation for life's workers.

In Table 4.1, we rework Gibson-Graham's ideas into a diagram that illustrates how labor can be refracted through the optics of activity and compensation. We differentiate a number of important labor activities based on the ways in which they are compensated (or not). We employ the lens of compensation to differentiate between capitalist and noncapitalist activities, while acknowledging that compensation is in many cases not the primary objective of these activities. The shaded examples provide a visual demonstration of how the kinds of labor associated with social reproduction can be further differentiated. While the social reproduction framing works to categorize certain activities as reproductive, the diverse economies framing labels all of these important activities as *productive labor*, whether or not they generate commodities or wages.

Admittedly, the complicated and intertwined labors of life's work may be exploitative and undesirable, even as they are producing something other than capitalism. Including all of these activities in the economy is a necessary step for enlarging the scope of noncapitalist possibility and narrowing capitalist production to one possible social relation among many others. It is this reframing that allows us to imagine life's work as (re)producing something other than capitalism and thinking through the implications (including exploitation) of those alternatives. Using this approach, what sorts of possibilities might we identify in the spaces and practices of life's work in the cities of Xining in China and Boston in the United States? In the next section we trace a postcapitalist countertopography between these places, where multiple activities of life's work are occurring in multiple places for multiple kinds of compensation.

A Postcapitalist Countertopography

As a concept, countertopography pushes us to consider the role of place in life's work (Katz 2001). Tracing the connections between spaces of caring, provisioning, and income generating in Boston and Xining, we were struck by the ways in which life's work occupied multiple spaces, including the home, the workplace, and community spaces. These accounts challenge the prognosis that blurring life and work necessarily increases precarity for women and households. While reading these places for possibility we are also inspired by the idea that "hegemony is secured—or might be frayed—in the overlapping spaces where home and work, the public and private, state and society converge" (Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2003, 433).

SPACES OF CARING, PROVISIONING, AND EARNING IN XINING, CHINA

Between 2006 and 2012, I (Kelly) spent a total of thirteen months researching the daily lives of mothers in the city of Xining. I was interested in mapping their diverse economic practices in various spaces of work and care. I began in my own neighborhood, on the east side of the city. Outside my apartment, in the semipublic courtyard my family and I shared with some three hundred other families, I observed how grandmothers provisioned and cared for their households. Some dried chilies on large tarpaulins in public spaces, others prepared large clay jars of *paocai* pickles with the help of neighbors, still others grew herbs in small gardens they had staked out in the public courtyard. People sat outside, sorting and preparing vegetables with the help of friends, knitting children's clothing, caring for toddlers and preschool children, and (sometimes) gambling over mah-jongg. In all this, grandmothers, grandfathers, and others performed productive and reproductive labor in a space that was neither public nor private.

This semipublic space enabled these individual and collective provisioning and care activities, some of which would not be possible indoors (such as drying chilies and growing herbs). The style of the courtyard is a product of a typical Chinese apartment arrangement: rows of apartments stacked six-stories-high with long, open public spaces between blocks. While the style is typically seen as “socialist,” the roots of this collective style of living go back much further than communism. Traditionally, houses in China were (and are) rooms arranged around a central courtyard, with a “wing” of several rooms for each son and his family. It is in the courtyard that life—and life’s work—mostly happened. The activities that occurred here included food preparation; washing of the body, dishes, clothing, and more; processing of farm produce and household commodities; and caring for children and entertaining visitors. The semipublic nature of this space of life’s work and production has been preserved in a more urban and collective way through the arrangement of apartments around courtyards that are neither fully public or private. The productive and reproductive labors of the grandmothers I observed are reflected in this contemporary version of a long tradition.

Provisioning and care occurred not only in community spaces but also across the road in workplaces at an open-air marketplace. Hui Muslim butcher-mothers hung curtains in the back of their stalls, and their small ones slept there to the sounds of cleavers sharpening and customers bargaining for their cut of halal mutton or yak-beef. Other marketplace mothers sat with babies on their knees, some breastfeeding even as they directed customers to select their goods from the precariously stacked piles outside their tiny spice or dry goods shops. An elderly Tibetan couple operated a small shop for children’s clothing, where all the stock was laid out on two iron bedsteads every day, sometimes intermingled with a sleeping grandchild. Customers could be seen gathering around their pot-bellied stove for cups of salted tea, as the grandfather searched through piles of colorful padded long-johns for the exact Disney rip-off print the customer desired.

In Xining the marketplace is also a space of life’s work, where children return after school, meals are cooked, babies are raised, friends and grandparents visit, self-provisioning occurs, and income is generated. Many of the activities carried out in the marketplace are actually *nonmarket* transactions and labor. In this space, it is particularly obvious that the labor of life’s work involves caring *and* provisioning *and* income-generating activities. In northwest China, mothers of young children are expected to earn an income, as they are in their “prime” years physically, and this is considered a central part of the act of mothering. Because of this, caring and providing (whether through income or direct subsistence activities) are not split or fully allocated to different people; caring and providing for children, the sick, or elderly is an act performed by multiple people

for different sorts of commensurabilities. These include gifting, wages, in-kind, traditional duties, unpaid, coercive, illegal and legal. The work is performed in love, in duty, in resignation, and in empathy—sometimes all mixed up together.

It is clear so far that the spaces of production and reproduction are intermingled and coproduced by activities of care and provisioning. The proximity of these spaces and activities creates openings where the caring needs of children and families can be negotiated alongside provisioning and income-generating activities. The glimmer of possibility that life's work offers here is that care work and even provisioning work can (and do) shape the nature of income-generating activities and spaces. This shift in perspective allows us to turn the question "how does work impact life?" on its head—and ask instead how life's workers can transform work to be more in line with the values and needs of life at any given time and place.

URBAN HOMESTEADING IN BOSTON

Urban homesteading is a sustainable lifestyle movement, largely defined by self-provisioning practices such as food preservation, urban gardening and agriculture, arts and crafts, and chicken- and beekeeping. From 2010 to 2012, I (Oona) conducted ethnographic research on the diverse economies of self-provisioning with individuals and households engaged in urban homesteading in greater Boston. Like many other U.S. and U.K. cities, landscapes of production and reproduction in Boston have been shaped by processes of capitalist industrialization that moved various kinds of provisioning and income-generating activities out of the home and into factories (Goodman and Redclift 1991; Hayes 2010). Given this context it is interesting to see a growing number of urban households in the United States bringing food production back into the household. Through self-provisioning, urban homesteaders refashion themselves as producers of household goods and services and politicize social reproduction, in ways that challenge the spatial and ideological separation of life from work that structures many U.S. cities.

The self-provisioning practices of urban homesteaders rework the spatialities of production and reproduction, blurring the boundaries between work and life in productive ways. While self-provisioning is often defined as unpaid household labor (Williams and Windebank 2003, 129), these practices are not always confined to the private home, nor are they always unpaid. For example, self-provisioning is also practiced collectively and in community spaces, and self-provisioned products are often distributed beyond the household through barter, gift, and sale. In Boston, household self-provisioning is enabled by multiple kinds of spaces within and beyond the home. These include: home and community spaces where urban homesteaders learn and share self-provisioning skills and

trade goods; home and community gardens where food production is possible; public, home, and community kitchens where self-provisioning can be practiced collectively, individually, and for profit; and public and private fruit orchards, urban and rural farms, and formal and informal food distribution networks that provide the raw materials for many self-provisioning practices.

Among these spaces, home represents an important site for cultivating and exploring the glimmers of possibility in life's work. Edith is a mother, public school nurse, entrepreneur, beekeeper, and second-generation West Indian immigrant who has been self-provisioning fruit, honey, and herbal remedies for health reasons for more than thirty years. Like the mothers and grandmothers in Xining, Edith's self-provisioning enables her to blur the boundaries between production and reproduction. As a school nurse she performs caring labor for a wage at work, but also distributes homemade herbal remedies to give students the same alternative health care she provides at home.

Sam is a father and bicycling advocate who works at a nonprofit; he has recently started self-provisioning for environmental reasons. The care ethics that Sam brings to household self-provisioning also trickle out into spaces beyond the home. For example, he provisions food with others in community kitchens and organizes cooperative enterprises that socialize unpaid and reciprocally paid food-provisioning labor. Caring for home at different scales, Sam and Edith stretch the boundaries of domesticity into community and work spaces. Similar to Xining, bringing paid, unpaid, and alternatively paid labor together creates openings for the social relations of life's work to trickle out into work and community spaces.

Sam and Edith both use domestic spaces to cultivate care for family and environment through self-provisioning. Care can be described as "a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and 'repair' our world so that we can live in it as long as possible" (Tronto 1993, 103). In different ways they bring care ethics into community and work spaces beyond the home, while enrolling other people and materialities into the activities of life's work. These shifting configurations of life's work bring production into the space of home, creating the conditions whereby social reproduction can shape production practices beyond the home. The ethical commitments that urban homesteaders invest in life's work can effect change in all of the sites and practices that this work touches.

Our postcapitalist countertopography has begun to map the connections between life's work in two parts of the globe. There is a sense of hopefulness and openness here: if life's work is being done everywhere, both in the margins and the centers of global capitalism, its very ubiquity holds the potential for transformations far beyond these two places. We can see glimmers of possibility

where life's work is coming to shape spaces and practices of production, and life's workers are seemingly recognizing some of the glimmers that "spark through the minutia and magnificence of life's work" (Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2003, 433). Recognizing glimmers is just a starting point. In the next section we explore how these glimmers of possibility can be consciously appropriated.

New Constellations: Appropriation and Negotiation

How exactly might these glimmers we have identified be consciously appropriated and strung together to produce something more than capitalist? How might we enroll them in a postcapitalist project of economic transformation? Mitchell, Marston, and Katz suggest that "to be transformative—to confound reproduction and maybe make something else—requires not only conscious appropriation of these sparks of recognition, but new modes of practice that build and rework the connections among the many spaces, actors and material social practices of life's work" (2003, 433).

These new modes of practice cannot stand alone, but must build and rework connections. To this end, our postcapitalist countertopography endeavors to trace the social and material connections between these moments of possibility, where they are being reworked within a constellation of economic difference and might be appropriated for the production of alternative collective futures. We thus return to our case studies for a second time, with a second goal in mind: to not just identify glimmers, but to show how these are being consciously appropriated and reworked into modes of practice that extend beyond the spark and beyond the individual.

While Mitchell, Marston, and Katz do not really define for us what they mean by conscious appropriation, we understand this to mean an intentional negotiation and organization of life in such a way as to enhance and foster transformation. In Boston and Xining, we use Gibson-Graham's ethical coordinates to think about the ways in which "something else" other than capitalism is being actively produced and made more real. Gibson-Graham (2006b) outline four ethical coordinates around which a community economy might organize and negotiate: surplus, necessity, the commons, and consumption. How might surplus be distributed? What is necessary for a good life? How do we care for and use the commons? And what negotiations can be made around consumption? In the context of our case studies, we focus primarily on negotiations around surplus and necessity.

By necessity we refer to the work that is "necessary for personal, social and ecological survival" (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2009, 331). What is necessary for personal survival is embodied, but it is also related to a broader collective and

can be negotiated in ways that account for the needs of others, including nonhumans. By surplus we refer to all of the work that is beyond what is immediately necessary for survival. In a capitalist enterprise much of the unpaid surplus that workers produce is appropriated by owners and invested in growth or taken as profits. Within traditional Marxist feminist theory women and households are understood as producing unpaid surplus in the form of domestic labor that is appropriated by their spouses (through patriarchal class relations), but also by employers (through capitalist class relations) (Dalla Costa and James 1972). Surplus can be negotiated, appropriated, and distributed differently through the individual and collective decisions of life's workers and with the help of enabling environments.

NEGOTIATING NECESSITY IN XINING

In Xining, intentional negotiations around necessity are indeed present. This is most obvious in the case of migrants who choose to come to Xining because of the possibilities of a lifestyle intermingling caring and production. In much of rural China, villages are rapidly emptying of working-age adults as they migrate thousands of kilometers to work in China's urban factories, living in workplace dormitories and leaving children and elderly people behind. But in Xining, I interviewed mothers who chose to come to Xining—situated in one of the poorest provinces in China—because of the lifestyle. Li Ping, a twenty-one-year-old mother of a young baby, migrated with her husband and his extended family before giving birth to her first child. The family opened a number of small stores in the city; they moved because “it is easy for us to earn money here.” Li Ping and her husband live in a loft bed in their small wine and cigarette shop, opening the doors each day at 8 a.m. and closing at 11 p.m. They share the care of their baby for much of the day and also share household tasks, such as cooking, and business tasks, such as ordering stock and serving customers.

Is this a matter of necessity and poverty—that they must live in their shop as they earn their living? Li Ping mentions that the rent for this kind of shop on a good street is indeed very high. In one sense it is “necessary” for her to live here. But in another sense, she and her extended family have not decided to go the route of other migrant workers, where the elderly and children must stay behind as the parents migrate to cities far away to earn their income. Li Ping is particularly pleased to be able to be a daily part of her eight-month-old baby's life, reflecting that for her the best thing since becoming a mother is: “Actually, caring for my child, and also taking him out to play. Actually having time. I see his smile and I feel so happy.”

Jing Yu, a forty-year-old mother of two, also migrated to Xining from a northeastern province with members of her extended family to find work. She has “left

behind” her eldest son, and has not lived with him for seven years. But with her second child, a girl of four months at the time of the interview, she has decided to do things differently. Negotiating what is necessary for life with her husband, they decided to live in a small storage room at the back of a rented vegetable shop so that she could stay with her baby and breastfeed her as required. Although she could earn more by leaving her child with her in-laws and working in her previous job as a nanny to other people’s children, she wanted to somehow keep her baby close by and enjoy raising and feeding her own child. Jing Yu is a cheerful and smiling presence in the couple’s vegetable shop, happy to cook for friends and share her small space with other, seemingly wealthier, friends with no embarrassment. Three years later, I returned to find her much the same, although with her daughter in preschool she has more time to work in various nanny and cleaning jobs than before.

While both Jing Yu and Li Ping face inconvenience and even hardship, their decisions to negotiate what is necessary through the spaces and practices of life’s work and paid work show an intentional appropriation of the glimmers of possibility that Xining offers. Rather than seeing themselves as forced into a situation of precarity, they see themselves as having resisted the left-behind migration style common all over China and chosen a migration style that better suits their desires for a particular type of mothering. While in China it is expected that a mother will earn an income, even if it means long periods of separation from her children and family, migrants such as Jing Yu and Li Ping have deliberately negotiated for something else.

Here, it seems that the spaces and activities of life’s work *are* reshaping to a small degree the spaces and activities of “productive” work, in an intentional way. The fact that each of these women has made her decision in the context of an extended family, and that they are just two among many who have migrated to Xining as an alternative to factory migration, means that these intentional negotiations around necessity are also being strung together into a different sort of constellation. This constellation offers more than glimmers of possibility, but an actually occurring reality where leaving behind one’s family is not viewed as a logical necessity for survival. In Xining capitalist production *does not* define everyday life, and social reproduction is in fact *shaping* the economic landscape of production and consumption. The mothers of Xining reveal—in a common-sense way—that different kinds of economies and subjectivities are possible, both now and in the future.

NEGOTIATING SURPLUS IN BOSTON

In Boston the moments of possibility in life’s work are being materialized through ethical negotiations around surplus. Because surplus is what we have left over

after meeting the necessities of life, decisions about how surplus ought to be appropriated or distributed are also shaped by understandings of what is necessary to personal, social, and ecological survival. Materializing glimmers of possibility through the concept of surplus helps us to trace how households in Boston are appropriating and distributing the surplus of life's work—and investing it in community and home enterprises. While surplus is often discussed in terms of value or time (the surplus value we don't even realize we're giving away while we work), the following empirical examples give a very material reading of surplus—by locating the surplus produced by life's work in objects like fruit, cake, plants, herbal remedies, and yogurt.

Edith and I are sitting beneath a grape arbor in her backyard, taking in the fruits of her labor. Bees' wings sparkle as they fly between the hive and the numerous fruit trees and bushes they pollinate, and behind us the afternoon heat infuses the air with scents from the herb garden. Edith is about to retire from her public service job and looks forward to having more time to spend in her backyard. Long before health-conscious parents worried about pesticides, genetically modified organisms, *E. coli* bacteria, or plastics contaminating their children's food, Edith planted her first apple tree and began to produce her children's baby food from scratch: "When they were small there was a real big scare with apples . . . I said, 'well I know my kids like apples so I'm going to grow them.' Now I have all this fruit," she laughs. What began as a source of food security for her household now produces surplus that is used as an alternative source of income, a gift to neighbors, and a home business. While her children were in school she used the fruit for bake sales, holiday markets, and fundraisers. The pear tree alone yields about USD \$1,000 each year in pear bread that is sold to a select group of lifelong customers.

Edith started self-provisioning herbal remedies out of necessity after her first child was born with health problems. "The doctor actually had the nerve to say to me, 'Don't get attached to him, because he might die.'" Refusing to give up on her son's life she took health care into her own hands, and started making herbal remedies and keeping bees. As her children, garden, and bees have grown up and flourished together she has been able to start several home businesses selling the surplus of her life's work. For health reasons, stemming largely from necessity, Edith has increased the time she devotes to social reproduction. In combination with the unpaid labor of her children and bees her household produces a significant amount of social and material surplus that is distributed at home, at work, and in the community for various forms of commensurabilities. Edith chooses to distribute this surplus beyond the household through gift and market transactions with neighbors, church members, and a broader public of consumers. The surplus that is produced by Edith through the spaces and practices of social

reproduction does not necessarily reproduce capitalism, but instead supports the community economy of her household, neighborhood, school, and church.

Sam and his family live a sustainable lifestyle that places environmental well-being at the center of life's work. For example, they have decided that driving a car is not necessary, but purchasing from local, family-owned, and cooperative enterprises is. Considering the ethics, sustainability, and pleasure of the foods they consume on a daily basis has led Sam's family to pursue a variety of self-provisioning practices at home. This was how Sam started making yogurt for his family each week, a choice that was informed by the pleasure of making things, the care ethics of sharing good food with others, the economic ethics of supporting a local dairy, and the environmental ethics of reducing plastic packaging. For Sam self-provisioning is not done out of a desire to become self-sufficient, but rather to reconfigure the social and material connections between his family and the broader social and economic networks they depend on. For this reason he decided to scale up and socialize some of his self-provisioning labor by starting a neighborhood yogurt-making co-op. Participating in a yogurt-making co-op enables Sam's family, and other members, to invest household surplus into cooperative consumption and production. As director of the co-op he gifts time and energy to maintain this zero-waste, sustainable, producer-consumer cooperative and to create spaces where surplus distribution can be negotiated cooperatively.

The decision to live a sustainable lifestyle has increased the time that Sam devotes to social reproduction and also the economic diversity of these practices. This has in turn multiplied the opportunities for ethical negotiations around surplus and necessity that take environmental well-being into account. Consciously appropriating the glimmers of possibility in life's work, Sam has reworked the connections between his household, neighborhood, and environment by distributing household surplus to a broader network of local, alternative, and cooperative enterprises. Sometimes Sam jokes that the various experiments his family engages in don't *really* matter and that some people might even find these daily negotiations kind of neurotic, but he can't imagine living any other way. He finds great joy in tinkering at the edges of life and work, and figuring out how to meet necessity and distribute surplus in ways that enhance the well-being of his family, community, and environment. The effect of these daily negotiations and practices should not be underestimated, as they hold the potential to (re)produce new subjectivities, habits, orientations, and economies.

In this section we have explored how surplus and necessity have been negotiated according to ethics of care for children, environment, and community. We suggest that these intentional negotiations are a kind of conscious appropriation of possibility, whereby the latent possibilities of life's work in Xining and Boston are harnessed and fashioned into new modes of practice. Between these distant

places we have found some commonalities. The negotiations by mothers in Xining over what kinds of environments can support their lifestyle suggests that lifestyle politics are by no means exclusive to (mostly middle-class) urban homesteaders in Boston. The lifestyle politics of life's work might even be strengthened by seemingly unrelated negotiations around surplus and necessity happening in different parts of the world. The decisions made by Sam to distribute household surplus to local shops and cooperative and community enterprises in Boston, and marketplace mothers in Xining deciding to become shopkeepers, could be read as a shared objection to migrant factory work. Figuring out how to live well with less in Xining might also provide surprising inspiration for households trying to live sustainably in Boston. Actions in both of these places contribute to strengthening a community economy that can support ethical negotiations around life's work.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have begun to flesh out a postcapitalist countertopography of life's work. Inspired by the openness to economic possibility evident in the work of J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006) and others in the Community Economies Collective, we sought to bring this approach into conversation with the concern for politicizing life's work evident in the work of Mitchell, Marston, and Katz (2003). Our key theoretical strategy has been to refract the concept of social reproduction through the lens of diverse economies in order to render social reproduction different from itself, and render production as much more than capitalist. This has enabled us to multiply the "glimmers of possibility" identified by Mitchell, Marston, and Katz through multiplying the nodes of decision-making. At these nodes of decision-making, we considered how we might identify and clarify the ethical choices (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2009, 330) involved in meeting necessity and appropriating and mobilizing the (surplus) possibilities of life's work.

In our case studies based in Xining and Boston, we showed how possibilities are produced, appropriated, and negotiated through entanglements with place. It is in these material contexts that we sketched a postcapitalist countertopography that drew these seemingly ephemeral glimmers together into a constellation of economic difference. The countertopography of life's work in Xining and Boston drew global interconnections between seemingly disparate struggles over surplus and necessity.

What did this sort of approach help us to achieve? For one, it evoked the ubiquity of life's work globally. While our two case studies are hardly a globally representative sample, connecting a place considered at the very margins of

“the global economy” with a place considered pretty close to the center of it is one way to highlight the range of places where life’s work—and surplus and necessity—are being negotiated in ways that can potentially produce something *other* than capitalism. It is this approach that adds the postcapitalist descriptor to our countertopography of life’s work. A postcapitalist countertopography of life’s work is a concept that can potentially go further in this field. By enrolling Katz’s countertopographical method into a politics of possibility, we have demonstrated a way to *proliferate* the possibilities for different kinds of noncapitalist futures, and show how life’s work might shape production in friendlier ways, rather than reproducing exploitation.

We were inspired to move away from the critical stance that “tends to confirm what we already know: that the world is full of devastation and oppression, and that transformation is an unlikely if not hopeless project” and toward an “open and reparative stance that refuses to know too much, that makes space for hope and possibility” (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010, 324). When applied to thinking about life’s work, multiplying possibilities for producing something other than capitalism has involved, for us, moving away from a perspective where life’s work is always reflecting, reproducing, and enabling capitalist domination. We have attempted to show how we might instead value “the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other” and where “the richest junctures weren’t the ones where everything means the same thing” (Sedgwick 1994, 5). By allowing life’s work and capitalism to be at loose ends with each other, we were able to identify the rich junctures where an ethics of care can enable negotiations around surplus and necessity, where something else can happen.

NOTES

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1. There are divisions in terms of age and life-stage, however. Mothers normally care for babies for three months to three years, depending on their other work. Grandmothers and grandfathers typically take over care work after this. This is considered a traditional responsibility of the paternal grandmother, although in actuality the arrangements are quite diverse.

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