

RETHINKING ECONOMY FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT:  
ONTOLOGY, PERFORMATIVITY AND ENABLING FRAMEWORKS FOR  
PARTICIPATORY VISION AND ACTION

A Thesis Presented

by

ETHAN LLOYD MILLER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 2011  
Geography



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Ethan L. Miller  
May 2011

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## DEDICATION

For Julie

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is born from a long, collective process of action, thought and learning; like all writing, the ideas recorded here are a quirky and imperfect distillation of a few things that I have gleaned from the many inspiring people, places and communities of which I am blessed to be a part. I offer this thesis as a small contribution to these larger conversations and struggles, and I can only hope to share in return a tiny fraction of the gifts that I have received.

I feel immense gratitude; but how to share this at the beginning of a thesis that is focused on making our constitutive interrelationships more visible in all of their complexity? Lest I write another two hundred pages thanking everyone from the bacterial ancestors that formed my mitochondria and the people who assembled my computer to the many friends who have loved and supported and encouraged me over the years and months and days (all of whom are, truly, crucial to my life and work), I will necessarily have to be selective. I will try to focus on key threads that helped to directly weave this thesis. For all of you left out of these paragraphs, known or unknown, forgotten or remembered: thank you for everything.

To begin, then, more specifically, I want to thank some of those whose guidance and companionship led me down the path of this work in the first place: Will Neils, who taught me to take responsibility for enacting my values in my communities; Matt Schlobohm, whose friendship is an anchor in my life, and whose creativity and insight has helped to spark so much of what I have dreamed and done; Bill Corlett, who shared

with me a world of theory that asks the questions I can no longer live without, and who has been a home-base ever since; Carl Straub, who inspired me to reconnect with my wild self and taught me to never forget the wren; J.K. Gibson-Graham, who taught me to imagine my life and work differently, who opened up the economy as a space for imagination and transformative action; and Julie Graham, in particular, whose trust and encouragement has been--and always will be--an unspeakably precious source of encouragement and sustenance in all of my life and work.

I have been blessed during my time at UMass with some excellent teachers, of which Julie was one. To name a few others: Henry Renski offered clear, thoughtful and encouraging guidance through the thickets of conventional regional economic development, with a particularly refreshing emphasis on challenging simple theories with the complexities of on-the-ground policy and planning practice; Lynn Margulis and others in the Margulis Lab have delightfully fueled my desire to move beyond a merely-human economics with their passionate commitment to science in the service of humility, mystery, and the enlargement of our sense of being-in-common with/as life on this planet; Eve Vogel both affirmed and challenged my approaches to thinking and action, strengthening my work through critical, insightful ideas and questions about the complexities of history, institutions and human aspirations for change; and Gretchen Rossman provided a delightfully open and experiential space in which to explore the practice and politics of participatory action research, sharing tools that will be crucial for my work in years to come.

None of this would be possible without academic and institutional support from members (and associates) of the Geosciences Department. Gratitude, in particular to the members of my thesis committee, Eve Vogel and Katherine Gibson, who have been deeply supportive, flexible, dedicated, and surprisingly cheerful in their commitments to reading this tome; to Piper Gaubatz, who has provided essential guidance through the process of navigating academia and its institutional mazes; and to Dick Wilkie, whose support made my (short) time at UMass possible, and whose warm greetings have brightened the hallways.

Beyond the world of academic work, I have been and continue to be sustained by many dear friends and comrades: my heart's home, the JED Collective on the Giant's Belly in Greene, Maine, and each of my dear Jeddars-- Alec, Auto, Bridgie, Daphne, Fanek, Iggy, KatieBee, Luana, Manis, Mike, Paulinho, Vava, and all who come and go yet make us what we are--each of you already making the world, the economy, and the community that I long to live in (and thankfully sometimes do!); Jim and Naomi Nesbitt, stewards of Clark Mountain; my dear Treehouse roommates, Jess and Olivia, who nourish my heart and mind and laughter and always make me feel at home; my families-- Millers, Schislars, Sheehans, Riffees, Beckers and Bovermans--each and every member, who support me in more ways than I can describe, and more ways that I can know; and, finally, my dear love Katie Boverman, who thinks and dreams with me at every step, and reminds me always what it means to be alive on this wild Earth.

To return to the document in hand, there are many brilliant and inspiring minds who have helped me to think through the ideas that are written here, who have taught me

new ways to see, wrestled with these very same hard questions, and thus are my not-so-ghostly co-writers (though without any blame for the specific follies and foibles of my writing). Gratitude to Katie Boverman, always one step ahead of the theorists, with a wisdom earned through seeing the world always-anew with wild eyes, and whose ideas about life, interrelationship and Gaia are woven throughout these pages; to Olivia Geiger, my late-night comrade, with whom many of the key concepts and questions in this thesis were hashed out, explored, and honed over 2am tea, and with whom I hope to hone many more; to Michael Johnson, who never ceases to get me fired up about loving, learning to live passionately and compassionately, asking hard questions, and envisioning a radical democratic social movement that can remake our worlds; to Ben Chin, my dear friend and breakfast buddy, whose political and ethical sensibility and commitment to justice call me to my best self, and whose trust and confidence helps to make my dreams seem always-possible; to Julie and Kath, as JKGG and separately, my mentors and companions at each step of this journey; and to my fellow travelers in the Rethinking Regional Development seminar at UMass and the Western Mass contingent of the Community Economies Collective (this thesis is just an elaborate bunch of notes from all that I have learned from and with you): Abby Templer, Cordelia Sand, Ed Harris, Eve Vogel, Fadia Hasan, Janelle Cornwell, Jenna Allard, Karen Werner, Katherine Gibson, Leo Hwang-Carlos, Michael Lally, Miriam Maynard-Ford, Olivia Geiger, Oona Morrow, Stephen Healy, Ted White, and Tim Sutton.

I give thanks as well for the organizations and projects of which I am a part, and to each of the incredible people who animate them. It is these communities with whom I



make and share commons, and with whom I choose--honored--to take my stand: the Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO) collective, working tirelessly to show us all the many ways that other economies are alive and growing in our midst; the Community Economies Collective the world over, cultivating a powerful, loving, collaborative and appreciative way of making knowledge and making change, linking theory and practice, and refusing to concede the open terrain of possibility; Maine Earth First! (aka Native Forest Network), fighting courageously with minds and hearts and bodies to defend land, culture, freedom and the more-than-human wildness that is the pulse of our living world; the Clark Mountain Community Land Trust, imagining and building a new democratic structure for sharing land in Maine; and the JED Collective, enacting the challenges and joys of ethical interdependence each and every day.

Finally, I give my heart to all of the incredible, inspiring friends in my Maine crew (I can't name you all, but you're here with me): you are the reason I'm doing all of this, and why I'm coming home when I'm done.

## ABSTRACT

### RETHINKING ECONOMY FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT: ONTOLOGY, PERFORMATIVITY AND ENABLING FRAMEWORKS FOR PARTICIPATORY VISION AND ACTION

May 2011

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The basic premise of this thesis is that the stories we tell about "the economy" in discourses of regional economic development play an active role in *shaping* the economic worlds that we live in. The construction of more equitable, democratic and ecologically-sound economic relationships must involve an interrogation of our assumptions about what "the economy" is, how it works, and how these conceptions shape our senses of agency and possibility. This thesis consists of three parts. First, I argue that key texts in regional economic development present a concept of economy (an *economic ontology*) that renders the interrelationships between social, economic and ecological processes invisible or beyond ethical contestation, restricts our understanding of economic sites to a narrow field and thus obscures economic possibility, and generates a problematic sense of necessity in the pursuit of endless growth and competition. To effectively enact different forms economic relationship, I suggest, we must develop and utilize different economic ontologies. Second, I explore what it means to propose that that "the economy" is socially-produced and that economic ontologies can be "performative." Drawing on work

by Butler, Laclau and Mouffe, Latour and others, I suggest that economies are enacted continuously through complex relationships among human and nonhuman actants. Conceptual economic discourse cannot be elevated above materiality nor separated from it, and the relationship between words and world will always remain indeterminate, yet ontological accounts might very well become important agents in world-making if we use them to organize strategically and take advantage of openings into new possibilities. The final portion of the thesis investigates alternative economic ontologies in the work of Karl Polanyi, Stephen Gudeman and J.K. Gibson-Graham. After offering a conceptualization of economy as a process of actively constructing *livelihoods* in which human and more-than-human participation are recognized and the ethical nature of this interdependence is placed at the forefront of economic negotiation and construction, I distill a provisional toolbox of economic questions, concepts and coordinates which might become sites of new learning, imagination and construction when placed in the hands of communities who seek a different kind of development.

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## INTRODUCTION

The basic premise of this thesis is that the stories we tell about the world make a difference. Rather than simply being descriptive accounts of an objective "reality," our concepts and theories play an active role in *shaping* the worlds that we live in. Ideas do not *determine* our worlds; nor do they *fabricate* them from nothing (it is not all a "language game"), but they can and do sometimes play a profound role in helping to bring them into being. What we think the world is made of, and how we think it all works, influences what we imagine, what we desire, and what we decide to make and do. Our concepts of "economy" and "economic development" are no exception. The current dynamics and institutions that constitute our economic lives are not written into the laws of nature; they are, rather, *produced* by specific historical processes in which our ideas about "the economy" have played a crucial role. This implies that the construction of different--more equitable, cooperative, democratic and ecologically-sound--economic relationships cannot simply be a matter of finding ways to *cope differently* with the overwhelming and demanding presence that we call "the economy." It must involve an interrogation of the very nature of this thing, our assumptions about what it is and how it works, and about the ways that these assumptions shape our sense of agency and possibility. As Gibson-Graham writes provocatively, "it is the way capitalism has been 'thought' that has made it so difficult for people to imagine its supersession" (2006a, 4).

Theories of regional economic development, as I will argue in Chapter 1, have contributed to constructing a widely-shared set of assumptions about *economic ontology*

(what "the economy" is and how it works)<sup>1</sup> that channel energy and imagination into a constricted set of options for communities to pursue. Facing an apparently omnipresent, ever-demanding, weather-like (often "global") economy, people in regions around the world often feel forced to take actions in the name of necessary growth and competition that otherwise undermine their fundamental values: to create jobs, to increase income, to attract capital, to "win" in the "global marketplace," regions clearcut their forests, tear apart their mountains, drain their rivers, sell off public lands and resources, slash social programs and public-interest laws, lower minimum wages, or *outsource all of these forms of violence to other regions* in order to maintain an attractive, competitive "quality of life" for wealthy consumer-citizens. The seeming necessity of these dynamics--the sense of their inevitability--is produced, in significant part, by the way that economy has been "thought," by the ways in which discourses of regional economic development have constructed and successfully promoted a concept of economy and development that make such ethical trade-offs appear as part of the fabric of nature itself.

This thesis will challenge such a conception of economy and development and explore other pathways for thinking that might open up space for *politics*. Indeed, this is a thoroughly political project, grounded in my commitment to the work of imagining and building more equitable, democratic, ecologically-sound, and loving ways of living together. Another regional development is possible, I believe, and I hope to contribute to its creation and institution. My points of intervention in this project are quite specific: recognizing the power of economic ontologies to shape and channel our imagination and

---

1 In philosophical terms, stories about the nature of the world, about what "is" and what "is not," are called *ontologies*--literally, "accounts of being (*onto-* means 'being'; *-logy* means 'the study of' or 'an account of')."



action, I seek to interrogate conventional accounts of economy, to understand more fully what it means to "perform" other economies into being, and to explore some alternative ontologies that might be useful in facilitating participatory inquiry into other economic possibilities.

While much of this thesis is theoretical, approaching economic discourse on a quite abstract level, its focus remains oriented toward action. For as will be made evident in my work on performativity in Chapter 2, we make our worlds only *partially* through the strategic use of ideas and discourses. Economies are produced by stories, but not by stories alone. To be made real, stories--ontologies--must ultimately be *enacted* by people who have put down the books (or theses), rolled up their sleeves and gotten down to the work of building a common world. This is true for the ontologies of the currently-dominant paradigm of economic development, and it is true for the other forms of livelihood that are already growing--and might yet grow more--in our midst. I am passionately committed to the idea that people (human and nonhuman), in their places, with their own hands and hearts, should be at the center of regional development processes. My theoretical work grows from this belief: if my project raises more questions than it answers (and I hope this is the case), it is because the most important questions cannot be answered in a thesis. They must be answered in processes of democratic imagination, negotiation and struggle. They must be answered, so to speak, *in the streets*.

For this reason, the reader will not find, in this document, elaborate explorations of alternative "models" for economic development. My project differs from work that

seeks either to identify "fundamental" problems in contemporary economic configurations and offer solutions, or to propose structural models for alternative economic organization. On one hand, a number of activist-scholars have sought to identify singular root causes of economic injustice in, for example, the money system (Greco 2001), the organization of the workplace (Benello 1992), the ownership and control of capital (DeFilippis 2004), or consumption patterns and resource use (Elgin 1981), and thus to propose alternative modes of activity as fundamental solutions in each domain. Such work makes crucial contributions to economic imagination, yet often tends to reduce a complex social field to simple causal relationships and risks generating a narrow politics in which people argue over which intervention is "more effective" rather than engage in action to build collaborative networks of support among diverse approaches. Other activist-scholars have sought to encourage economic transformation by proposing comprehensive, systemic models as alternatives to the currently-dominant "economic system" (Albert 2004; Hahnel 2005; Schweickart 1996). This approach is also useful--offering important insights and visions to inspire creative action--yet risks both perpetuating an essentialist notion of an organized, systemic economy and a sectarian approach to economic politics in which various rational models seek to "duke it out" in the field of either rhetoric or political action, again risking the eclipse of more collaborative and collective processes of transformative engagement.

The theoretical work of this thesis is not an attempt to figure out what an alternative regional development "should" look like. It does not seek to identify singular key linchpins of regional economic change, fundamental causes of economic dynamics or

to offer structural models for alternative regional economic organization. My focus is instead on how various conceptualizations of "economy" might contribute to *processes in which people work collectively to envision their own pathways for local and regional economic development*. The emphasis is thus on ways of *seeing and thinking*--avoiding strong decisions about what dimensions of economic life to name as specifically privileged locations for change--that can enable unique, place-specific processes of such analyses and strategic decisions. What are, I hope to ask, the key questions that people might ask themselves when imagining different economic relationships in their places? What ways of thinking and frameworks for inquiry might generate fruitful and inspiring directions for planning and action?

The pathway carved out by this thesis is as follows. In Chapter 1, I engage with the widely-adopted and enacted paradigm that I call "conventional regional economic development" (or simply "conventional RED"). After elaborating further on the concept of "economic ontology" and its importance in helping us to understanding the effectivity of economic discourse, I undertake a reading of prominent texts within the field. The ontology of conventional RED, I argue, presents a concept of economy and economic dynamics that renders the interrelationships between social, economic and ecological processes invisible or beyond ethical contestation; restricts our understanding of economic sites and institutions to a narrow field and thus obscures economic possibility; and generates a problematic sense of necessity in the pursuit of endless growth and competition. To truly and effectively enact different forms of economy and economic relationship, I suggest, we must develop and utilize different economic ontologies.

Chapter 2 takes a step back from this claim to ask, in some detail, what it means to propose that "the economy" is socially-produced and that ontologies can be "performative." Before engaging with a robust exploration of alternative economic representations, in other words, we must understand more clearly what we expect these discourses to *do* in the world. Is it enough to simply "change the story"? Is there more at work in the process of making worlds? How do we account for this and how might our understanding of the performativity of discourse (and more) help us to be strategic about our ontological choices? I explore these questions through theoretical engagement with the work of Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Bruno Latour and others. The world, I suggest, is enacted--continuously--through complex relationships among human and nonhuman actants. Conceptual discourse cannot be elevated above materiality nor separated from it, and the relationship between words and world will always remain indeterminate. Yet our ideas might very well become important agents in world-making if we use them to organize strategically and to enlist enough allies. Processes of world-making provide many opportunities for swerves, departures from old patterns and openings into new possibilities.

The cultivation of concepts and frameworks that can enable us to see, feel and thus enact economic possibility is the focus of Chapter 3. Given the violence and closure perpetuated by conventional RED's ontologies, how should we think *differently* about economy? After defending the importance of the term "economy" as a site of struggle and resignification, I explore alternative economic ontologies through the theories of Karl Polanyi and J.K. Gibson-Graham. Building on the work of both, I describe a way of

thinking about economy as a process of actively constructing *livelihoods* in which human and more-than-human participation are recognized and the ethical nature of this interdependence is placed at the forefront of economic negotiation and construction.

How, then, should we understand the specific ways in which livelihoods are enacted? I turn to theoretical frameworks by Polanyi, Stephen Gudeman and Gibson-Graham for assistance in answering this question. In examining Polanyi's "substantive approach" to economy, Gudeman's framework of "market and mutuality" (and "commons") and Gibson-Graham's notions of "ethical coordinates" and the "diverse economy," I tease out a wide range of key questions, concepts and points of negotiation that might be considered in processes of economic inquiry, vision and planning. These are all conceptual tools that can be useful--in different ways and at different points in a process--for democratic regional economic development.

I conclude this thesis, finally, with an opening: an idea for further conceptual development might help us to link elements of these frameworks together, raising questions about *place*, *habitat* and *commons* as possible points for collective inquiry, deliberation and creative action. This unfinished ending reflects the general intent of my writing: to learn from those who have already, creatively and passionately, engaged in the work of imagining new economic ontologies; to learn from my own imagined conversations with and between them; and to begin the never-finished work of distilling a provisional toolbox of questions, concepts and coordinates which might become sites of new learning, imagination and construction when placed in the hands of communities who seek a different kind of development.

## CHAPTER 1

### CONVENTIONAL REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: CONSTRUCTING NECESSITY, CONSTRAINING POSSIBILITY

#### **Introduction: "It's Not Perfect, But It's The Only Plan We've Got"**

In December of 2004, the Plum Creek corporation<sup>2</sup> announced that it would seek a zoning change on a portion of its 900,000 acres of Maine forest land. Having purchased the land under the auspices of managing for timber and pulp production, Plum Creek asked Maine's Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) to permit a massive new development along the shores of Moosehead Lake: 975 second-home lots, two large-scale luxury resorts, a golf course, a recreational marina, three RV parks and a number of shopping center clusters to serve the anticipated influx of tourists and seasonal residents. Over the course of a four-year process of hearings, plan revisions and public comment, thousands of Maine people voiced opposition to plan.<sup>3</sup> Despite claims by Plum Creek and its supporters (primarily Plum Creek employees, politicians, economic development professionals and a few local retail business owners) that the plan would bring "economic development" to the struggling region, people voiced strong concerns about the effects of luxury tourism on the ecological integrity of the region, established local businesses, land-based livelihood practices, and the "culture and way of life" of Northern Maine.

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2 Plum Creek is a real estate investment trust (REIT) based in Seattle, Washington and, with approximately seven million acres under its control, is the largest private landowner in the U.S.

3 According to the Natural Resources Council of Maine, only eight of the 1,768 written public comments submitted to LURC were clearly in favor of the rezoning and approximately two-thirds of the 1,200 people speaking at public hearings opposed the plan (a significant proportion of the other third spoke "neither for nor against" and raised strong concerns). Natural Resources Council of Maine, "Plum Creek's Massive Moosehead Proposal: In-Depth Description." [http://www.nrcm.org/issue\\_plumcreek.asp#indepth](http://www.nrcm.org/issue_plumcreek.asp#indepth). Accessed 3 December 2010.

Yet Plum Creek prevailed. Their rezoning plan was approved by LURC in September of 2009, modified only slightly and including an agreement to sell a large conservation easement on other portions of its non-development land (allowing continued industrial forestry use). Massive tourist development of the largest undeveloped freshwater shoreline in the Northeastern U.S. was allowed to proceed full-steam. Why was the force of democratic opposition unable to sway the committee? The reasons are many, but one dimension stands out and was expressed lucidly in a television commercial run by Plum Creek during the rezoning process. After a voice-over described the economic benefits of the development plan for a struggling Northern Maine economy, a local man from Greenville (the only town bordering the proposed development area) appeared on the screen to proclaim, with a grave tone, "Plum Creek's plan isn't perfect, but it's the only plan we've got."

It was a profound eclipse of imagination and possibility, enabled by a particular set of stories told about the region, about the economy, and about what was "necessary" for the improvement of lives and livelihoods. In the face of in-depth evidence and argumentation--from many people and organizations across the state of Maine--regarding the likely negative effects of the development on local and regional ecosystems, wildlife populations (including the endangered Canada Lynx), and even local human communities, a singular logic prevailed:<sup>4</sup> Northern Maine is a region devoid of economic opportunity and despite possible (even likely) shortcomings, the Plum Creek

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<sup>4</sup> As a participant in the official party hearing process during the crux of the deliberations in 2007 and 2008, volunteering with the Native Forest Network, I was able to see the process in intimate detail. In my evaluation, the primary reason that Plum Creek was able to win the support of local people (many of whom, as even their own television ad suggests, were not *excited* about the plan) was their utilization of a discourse of regional underdevelopment and the posing of their plan as the only viable pathway for the improvement of the Moosehead region's economy.

development plan would bring jobs, growth and improvement to this struggling area in a way that no other economic development pathway possibly could. It may not be what local people *want*, but it is--according to this narrative--what local people *need* if they are to improve their lives. The degradation of the ecological and cultural integrity of the region--and the continuation of a long-standing pattern of economic colonialism whereby large, out-of-state corporations own, control and profit from Maine's resource base--is an inevitable cost of the necessary process of regional economic development.

This is a familiar story--one that plays out over and over again in communities and regions around the world that have become subject to a particular economic worldview and development regime that I will refer to in this thesis as "conventional regional economic development (RED)."<sup>5</sup> This hegemonic constellation of practices, theories, institutions and subjectivities asserts and sustains an ontology<sup>6</sup> of economy that places "economic necessity"--to grow, to innovate, to produce, to develop, to compete, to develop by any means necessary--over and above peoples' needs and aspirations for healthy communities, for dignified and satisfying work, for democratic processes of visioning and planning, and for responsible relationships with the wider more-than-human world of which we are a part. Conventional RED, in fact, is built on a premise that

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5 I use the term "conventional" to indicate the current hegemonic status of the regime of economic development that I will be exploring in the next section of this chapter. The two senses of the term "conventional" capture a great deal about the discursive status of this regime: in one sense, it is conventional in that it appears *ordinary*, almost natural--a set of assumptions that are removed from the possibility of contestation in the domain of public economic politics; in another sense, it is conventional as a *bundle of conventions*, a set of practices, habits and theorizations pertaining to "the economy" that have been institutionalized and accepted as "standard operating procedure" by policymakers, development professionals, and many citizens in regions around the world.

6 I use the term ontology here in the sense of "an account of being"--a story about what the world is made of and how these constituent elements are related. I will elaborate on my use of this term--particularly in an "economic" context--later in the following section of this chapter.



the achievement of human well-being can only be accomplished through the pursuit of activities which have been shown, time and time again, to compromise this well-being either directly--by undermining local environments and livelihood systems--or indirectly--by undermining the environments and livelihoods systems of human and nonhuman people in other places (Jensen 2004; 2006; McMurtry 1998; McKibben 2007; Mies and Shiva 1993).

The economy, in this regime, "is not ours to make and remake, but is instead self-made" (Healy and Graham 2009, 292). Constituting economy as a weather-like force beyond the reach of human capacity, conventional development practice is restricted to supporting and reproducing a limited and problematic array of economic relationships in the name of employment growth and regional competitiveness. Thus forests are clearcut to produce jobs for local people and profit for companies that will inject "necessary" investment into the wider economy (Jensen and Draffan 2003); toxic waste incinerators are sited in low-income communities (often communities of color) to "bring jobs" to the neighborhood or region (Bullard 1993; Faber 1998; Westra and Bill E. Lawson 2001); towns, cities and states hand over tax dollars (while cutting crucial public services) to multinational corporations as incentives for locating (often temporary) plants and providing (often insecure) jobs (DeFilippis 2004; Williamson, Imbroscio, and Alperovitz 2003); neighborhoods are gentrified and low-income housing is removed in order to "attract investment" --often in the name of "helping," ironically, the people who are then forced to move out (Smith 1996); and for-profit prisons, capitalizing on crime and racism, promise to bring much-needed growth to rural towns (Farwell 2010).

Such contradictory processes--killing the patient to save the patient--are legitimated, in significant part, through the production of *inevitability*. Conventional RED functions to reproduce a hegemonic economic ontology that harmonizes the interests of diverse and conflicting groups in the name of a shared subjection to economic necessity. In the case of the Plum Creek plan, contracted economists and other researchers produced reams of studies "documenting" the economic benefits of the rezoning and development to local communities positioned in their discourses as needy and underdeveloped (Colgan 2007; Stratus Consulting Inc. 2007; Eastern Maine Development Corporation 2007). The interests of a Seattle-based real estate investment trust, throngs of imagined second-home vacationers, rural Mainers, and regional policymakers seeking (ostensibly) increased economic well-being for people in Northern Maine are united--or, perhaps more accurately, subjected--by a common sense of what "the economy" is, what "development" should and must mean, and what costs should and *must* be borne in the name of such progress.

How is it that contemporary narratives of economic development can produce these unlikely alliances? How does the very unlikeliness of these alliances become obscured by the ways that conventional RED conceptualizes economy and economic development? How is it that we so often come to accept as inevitable the "fact" that in order to enhance our lives and livelihoods we must consistently enact decisions that appear to undermine them? Through what conceptual operations--materialized in policies and practices--does the economy cease to be a site of imagination, possibility and democratic deliberation and become, instead, a site of constraint, subjugation and

necessity? I seek to explore dimensions of these questions in this chapter through a critical reading of key texts in conventional regional economic development. I argue, drawing on the work of Gibson-Graham, Polanyi and others, that the economic ontologies implicit in conventional RED participate in a process of producing "the economy" as a particular domain of social life that is insulated from political contestation, from ethical deliberation and from social practices of creativity and imagination. This effect is generated by the theory's constitution of the economy as, on one hand, an objective system of activity governed by laws and characterized by measurable, quasi-predictable dynamics and, on the other hand, a set of disguised normative principles--what McMurtry (1998) calls "value practices"--that smuggle a very particular set of ethical visions into a seemingly-objective domain.

Conventional practices of local and regional economic development have been compellingly critiqued on a number of fronts. The emphasis placed on attracting non-local firms and investment has, for example, been challenged as an eclipse of local control (Schuman 2000; Williamson, Imbroscio, and Alperovitz 2003), a devaluation of regional assets (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993) and a process through which regional economies become increasingly vulnerable to extra-regional volatility (Hines 2000; Williamson, Imbroscio, and Alperovitz 2003). Frameworks of conventional regional development have likewise often been critiqued for their refusal to interrogate the broader economic, social and political contexts that generate firm-centered "necessities," and perpetuate chronic spatial inequities between regions (Massey 1979; Harvey 1982; 2005; Hudson 2007a). The associated acceptance of endless inter-regional competition has been

said to generate a "race to the bottom" in terms of labor, environmental and social policies (LeRoy 2005; Brecher and Costello 1998). Conventional RED theory has been said to naturalize inequality within regions, and thus suppress discussion about issues of economic distribution (Friedmann and Weaver 1979; Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney 2006; Hadjimichalis and Hudson 2007). It has been critiqued as a model fundamentally opposed to genuine democratic participation (Lummis 1996). Finally, conventional RED has been challenged as perpetuating a socially and ecologically-destructive path of overconsumption and unlimited quantitative growth (Daly and Cobb 1989; Daly 1996; Trainer 1996; Jackson 2009).

These critiques are crucial, for they help to expose the real effects of conventional economic development strategy on people, communities and ecosystems and thus to open profound questions about the ethical implications of conventional RED theory. My project in this chapter, however, is not to pursue such critiques. Rather than condemning specific economic development prescriptions or strategies, tracing the destructive effects of particular economic interventions, or calling for precise changes in the policies and outcomes that should be demanded by a just, democratic and ecologically-responsible regional development project, I seek to challenge--and to explore options beyond--a more fundamental dimension of conventional RED: that of *economic ontology*, the account of economic reality presented by (and thus supported by) these economic development discourses. I want to examine and critique not the specific actions or outcomes that conventional RED calls forth, but rather the very way in which "the economy" is imagined and the ways in which this imaginary functions to enable or disable possibility,

to render "the economy" into an object distinct from the domain of politics and democratic decision, and to make invisible the constitutive interrelationships that produce both human and more-than-human livelihoods in communities, regions and networks of habitats.

Theories and discourses of conventional regional economic development have been important agents in the formulation of the on-the-ground strategies and practices, such as those manifest in the Plum Creek development process, that work to shape the economy, produce economic subjects and delimit economic possibility. As Isserman writes in regard to the productive power of economic base theory, a key formulation in conventional RED, "the economic base analysis provided a way of understanding the organization of the economy, which was then used to organize part of the planning process and produce specific planning recommendations" (2000, 184). Theories of economic development do not simply explain an independent world that exists "out there," separate from the theories themselves; rather, the production of economic knowledge is part and parcel of the production of the economy itself. Economics, as Callon (2007) has pointed out, is *performative*: the stories we tell about the world help to *make* the world. By influencing what is visible or invisible, valued or valueless, important or marginal, causal or merely a recipient of effects, possible or impossible, plausible or unlikely, economic or non-economic, theories about regional economic development shape action, policy, imagination and subjectivity.<sup>7</sup>

It is not enough, then, to interrogate the effects of conventional economic development policy or to argue over the specific strategies that it calls forth with regard

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<sup>7</sup> The notion of performativity and its role in economic development will be elaborated in Chapter 2.

to economic development. It is not enough to debate the extent to which these theories succeed or fail in accurately capturing what is "really going on" in "the economy." Nor is it enough to develop detailed proposals for alternative strategies and forms of economic development that assume the nature of "the economy" from the outset. These are all important (albeit always-problematic) strategies, but they must be pursued in the context of a different kind of inquiry, a form of research which recognizes the productive power of theory at the *ontological* level. We must investigate the way in which economic development theories help to constitute the very field of "economy" in which any development is then conceived and pursued. Such inquiry must trace the outlines of this ontology, to examine its effects, and open up space in which we might imagine it differently. In the following portion of this chapter I will look "below" the level of economic strategy, trying to tease out the more fundamental story that is being told in conventional RED about the nature of economy--what it is, how it works, and what these conceptions mean for our engagement with its development. Before delving into this project, however, it is important to further clarify the notion of ontological inquiry in general and "economic ontology" in particular. This will provide necessary conceptual tools for the work to follow.

### **Ontological and Ontic Approaches to Economy**

Much conventional economic theory, according to feminist economist Judith Mehta, refrains from interrogating the basic accounts of reality upon which it bases its empirical inquiries. In an essay seeking to challenge the foundations upon which

orthodox economic knowledge is built and to open up conceptual space for new ways of knowing and theorizing economy, Mehta (2008) elaborates on Heidegger's distinction between the "ontic" and the "ontological." In *ontic* inquiry, she suggests, "presuppositions about the fundamental mode of being of things are taken for granted in advance and embedded in the concepts and methods deployed by inquiry" (2008, 76). The essential categories of the world--the *ontological* dimension--are already known or assumed and thus become invisible as foundational constructions upon which ontic research takes place. As Heidegger writes, ontologies "precede the ontic sciences and found them" (1996, 9).

Ontological inquiry, then, does not take for granted the basic categories of being but rather opens them as questions, as objects for investigation.<sup>8</sup> Here, "the focus of attention...is on the being of things, that is, the meaning and identity of things in a certain arena" (Mehta 2008, 76). Ontological research thus involves an investigation--often unsettling--about the very ground upon which ontic inquiry builds its observations. Foucault's genealogy (1984), Derrida's deconstruction (1998), Butler's performativity (1993), Laclau and Mouffe's articulation (2001), Latour's mediation (1987)--these are all forms of contemporary ontological theorization and inquiry that seek to uncover elements of the constitutive conditions of possibility in and through which beings and categories are stabilized, and to trace the effects of these stabilizations. These forms of inquiry open

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8 It is important to note here that the distinction between ontic and ontological does not imply a *critique* of ontic inquiry. Indeed, all ontological inquiry that seeks to do things in the world must, at some point, become ontic, and all ontic inquiry must also be emergent from an ontology. The distinction simply allows us to avoid the evasion of ontology and the naturalization of the kinds of beings and categories upon which any ontic investigation is based. As Mehta writes, "without ontological presuppositions of some kind, there would be no conceptual apparatus and so no way for inquiry to 'get off the ground.' But there must be recognition that presuppositions are exactly that and no more and that they may be open to questioning and challenge" (2008, 76).

up the possibility that such beings and categories--and the relations between them--can be questioned, displaced, reconfigured, and made *differently*.

Mehta applies the ontic/ontological distinction to economic inquiry, recognizing that much of "orthodox" economics operates at the level of the ontic and resists any interrogation of its deeper ontological assumptions<sup>9</sup>:

In modern positivist economics, the mathematical appears in ontic form as that aspect of things with which we are already familiar, that we take as given, and that we bring with us in the construction of knowledge... We can only count three things [firms, machines and workers, for example] if we already know (or we have determined) both 'three' and 'the things to be counted'; this application of the mathematical tells us nothing about the concepts of 'threeness,' 'firm,' 'machine,' or 'worker.' (2008, 78).

In order to arrive at a point in which the (ontic) quantifying operations of economic mathematics can take place, the (ontological) elements of an "economic" world must already be assumed or posited. The research process of tracing and measuring the relations and dynamics among and between economic entities--firms and workers, for example--relies on a more fundamental ontology of the economic in which the existence and nature of a firm and a worker has already been decided.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, there must be an ontological assertion of *economy* as a domain of being--and more specifically, an economy which holds together systematically as a measurable assemblage constituted by clearly-defined "economic" entities.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Tony Lawson (2006) proposes that the distinction between "orthodox" and "heterodox" economics lies precisely in their differing ontologies, though neither domain of the discipline makes these distinctions sufficiently clear in their own self-theorizations. In this sense, we might say that both orthodox and heterodox economics often remain focused on the ontic level even if both Lawson and Mehta's work suggest that heterodox economics is (or should be) more open to conscious ontological inquiry.

10 Zuniga's work on Carl Menger's economic theory is a rare presentation of such an ontology: "Economic reality," she writes, "is constituted by economic objects such as goods, commodities, money, value, price, and exchange which together give rise to the complex entity known as the market" (1998, 299).

11 It should be noted here that a distinction can be made between *economic ontology*--an ontology that



It is this economic ontology--that is, an ontology that posits "the economy" as a domain of being--that delimits the forms of knowledge that may then be produced in the name of economics: "It is by imputing coherence and uniformity to all bodies within a class," writes Mehta, "that the 'axiomatic project' makes possible a universal, uniform measure as the fundamental descriptor of things... And once the meaning of things is reduced to their calculable aspects, only a narrow kind of data is available to investigation" (Mehta 2008, 78).<sup>12</sup> What is true for the collection of data is also true for the theorization of dynamics, for the categorization of objects and relationships and for the construction of prescriptions for "economic" action. Ontological assumptions about "the economy" profoundly influence the shape of public policy and imagination in the domain of human (and nonhuman) livelihood. Particularly given the power of "the economic" to mobilize resources, constituencies, institutions and desires in contemporary life, the question of *what counts* as economic and *how this counts* matters profoundly.<sup>13</sup>

I will elaborate on and explore some of the implications of approaching economics ontologically further below. For now, it is enough to say that my engagement

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proposes the existence of an economic domain in general--and *ontology of the economic*--a set of ontological claims about the nature of that domain. To return to Lawson's work (see Fn. 7), it could be said in light of this distinction that orthodox and heterodox economics substantially *share* an economic ontology but differ in their ontologies of the economic. Issues raised by this distinction will be explored further below.

12 The ontological distinctions often implicit in the division between micro- and macroeconomics is a case in point, where such a difference generates distinct and sometimes quite conflicting and contradictory knowledges about what an economy is and how it works. Best and Widmaier (2006) explore some of the ethical implications of the micro/macro distinction and how they manifest in economic policy.

13 Uskali Maki, in his edited book on economic ontology, writes of core economic assumptions that, "such ontological principles have social consequences: the effectively help identify the genuine participants in a programme and exclude others as non-participants" (2001, 5). We can see this in the Plum Creek struggle: those participants able to mobilize powerful "economic" arguments--and thus count as truly "economic" actors--were able to trump all "non-economic" perspectives since "non-economic" elements appeared less likely to contribute toward the Holy Grail of "economic development."

with conventional RED theory will proceed not along primarily *ontic* lines--interrogating the "accuracy" or "efficacy" of a given set of theories to explain economic dynamics or to craft policy; rather, I will explore this domain from a perspective of economic *ontology*: what, for these theories, "is the economy made of? What are its parts and how do they hang together? What kinds of general principles govern its functioning and its change?" (Mäki 2001, 3). And what, then, might the implications of such ontologies be for regional economic politics, for ethical practice, and for collective transformative action?

### **Ontologies of Conventional Regional Economic Development**

"What is the economic situation now? What could the economic situation be? How can the economic situation be changed?" These are the opening questions in Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller's text on local and regional economic development, *Community Economics: From Theory to Practice* (2004, 8). One of the fundamental goals of economic development, the authors suggest, is to develop a practical "understanding of the full range of choices available to alter economic circumstances" (2004, 6). I share this concern, and I want to read their text--and other key writings in the realm of conventional RED--in light of such intentions. Do conventional perspectives, in fact, enable such an understanding of the "full range of choices" that people in communities and regions might have to change their economic lives? What *do* these theories enable? And what limits do they pose to the task of altering our "economic circumstances"?

While it is beyond the scope and purpose of this thesis to engage in a full review of conventional economic development literature, I will draw on a number of sources in

the analysis that follows, including substantive readings of two prominent books in the field: Schaffer, Deller and Marcouiller's *Community Economics* and Stimson, Stough and Roberts' *Regional Economic Development: Analysis and Planning Strategy* (2006). The view that I will present in this chapter as "conventional RED" is not, to be clear, an "accurate" representation of a consensus among theorists and practitioners of the field. The conventional RED that is presented here is, instead, an aggregation, a kind of "straw man" developed for heuristic purposes, meant to offer a general picture of key assumptions and tendencies within a diverse and complex field. Indeed, as J.K. Gibson-Graham write in regard to a similar analytical strategy used in their work to engage the concept of "capitalism":

If this catalogue seems concocted from exaggerations and omissions, that will not surprise us. For we have devised it in line with our purposes, and have left out all manner of counter and alternative representations. Indeed, as our critics sometimes charge, we have constructed a "straw man" - or more accurately a bizarre and monstrous being that will never be found in pure form in any other text. The question then becomes, what to do with the monster? (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 9-10).

Monster, indeed. Yet one that is not far from the concrete ways in which regional economic development is thought and practiced throughout the United States (and, to be sure, many other places as well). My representation of conventional RED can be seen as an attempt to "get at" the gist of an aggregate practice of development, to pull out and highlight some of its most pervasive and problematic elements, and to set up a landscape of thought in which to situate an alternative set of approaches.

I will begin this exploration by asking about how "regional economic development" is defined in this literature. What kinds of explicit definitions are offered by conventional RED to define its fields of inquiry and intervention? This will set the

stage for a series of more detailed yet abstract explorations regarding the economic ontologies expressed in and produced by these texts. Throughout, I will seek to be attentive to the implications of such theorizations for economic development practice, for what appears to be possible or impossible, and for the degrees and forms of imagination that might be exercised or cultivated around economic development at a regional scale.

### *Definitions of Regional Economic Development*

In much of the conventional RED literature and practice, suggest Stimson, Stough and Roberts, economic development is understood primarily as "a growth-inducing, problem-solving business activity" (2006, 34). Blakely, similarly, defines regional economic development as "a process in which local governments or community based organizations are engaged to stimulate business activity and/or employment" (Blakely 1994, xv). Their business-centered focus is evident in the on-the-ground work of organizations such as the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council, dedicated to "leading the region's economic development by helping businesses to *expand, relocate and succeed* in Western Massachusetts" (italics in original)<sup>14</sup> and in the common notion of a regional "business climate," nearly always accompanied by a normative injunction to make this climate "favorable" by reducing barriers to business investment and development, lowering labor costs and reducing cumbersome public regulations (Eathington, Todd, and Swenson 2005).<sup>15</sup>

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14 Western Massachusetts Economic Development Corporation. "Western Mass EDC Home." Accessed December 5, 2010. <http://www.westernmassedc.com/>.

15 See, for example, the "Business Climate" section of the International Economic Development Council's

Yet clearly it cannot be said that the sole focus of regional economic development has been on the growth and development of firms. Notions centered on wealth-creation and well-being are also widespread. The American Economic Development Council (AEDC), an organization focused on providing resources and training to regional development professionals in the U.S., affirmed a definition of economic development in 1990 which, according to Maliza, "represent[ed] a consensus among many different viewpoints" in the field (Maliza 1994, 83):

Economic Development: the process of creating wealth through the mobilization of human, financial, capital, physical and natural resources to generate marketable goods and services. The economic developer's role is to influence the process for the benefit of the community through expanding job opportunities and the tax base (quoted in Maliza 1994, 83).

When the AEDC became the International Economic Development Council in 2001, this definition was changed and distilled. Economic development is now defined by the organization as, "a program, group of policies, or activity that seeks to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for a community, by creating and/or retaining jobs that facilitate growth and provide a stable tax base."<sup>16</sup> Between these two related definitions, we can see many of the core elements found throughout conventional RED regarding its goals and foci: the production of wealth and/or the achievement of "economic well-being" as a primary goal, the mobilization of resources for production (by businesses) to serve this goal, the centrality of commodities and market exchange relations in the realization of such wealth, and the core strategy of economic growth,

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website: [http://www.iedconline.org/?p=Guide\\_Climate](http://www.iedconline.org/?p=Guide_Climate). Accessed December 5, 2010.

16 International Economic Development Council. "Frequently Asked Questions About IEDC." <http://www.iedconline.org/?p=FAQs>. Accessed December 5, 2010.

measured and achieved through increased employment and/or higher tax revenues for local and regional governments.

Between a notion of regional economic development as "growth-inducing business activity" and one of "improving economic well being and quality of life," we find both a tension and a consensus. On one hand, the focus is on business growth, enterprise, and the well-being of firms. In an extreme sense, this approach is justified by generalizing the (in)famous contention by Charlie Wilson that "what's good for General Motors is good for America" (Audretsch 2007, 72). Blakely's definition of economic development offers a more nuanced view of the same perspective. For him, "the principal goal of local economic development is to stimulate employment opportunities in sectors that improve the community, using existing human, natural and institutional resources" (1994, xv). The immediate goal is indeed the strategic "stimulation" of business activity, justified by its potential to generate the *indirect effect* of improvements in well-being. Wolman and Spitzley, on the other hand, appear to invert this relationship by centering development on the goal of "an increase in the economic well-being of area residents, usually manifested by positive changes in the level and distribution of area employment and per capita income" (1996, 116). Here, increases in business activity (manifest as jobs and income) are not goals, but rather *strategies* toward the core goal of increasing well-being.

This may, indeed, reveal a tension; yet it also reveals a significant agreement. Both approaches appear to be two sides of the same conceptual-strategic coin: whether understood as goal or strategy, cause or effect, the well-being of people is inextricably

bound to a specific notion of the well-being of business. The two are, in fact, made nearly identical such that one could not imagine a situation in which business decline (or a "hostile business climate") could ultimately result in a robust increase in community well-being and quality of life. The difference between the two approaches is primarily one of distance and agency. In Blakely's conception, community well-being is placed at a more distant location as a hoped-for ripple of agential activity in the realm of business; for Wolman and Spitzley, the work of improving well-being is placed a bit closer as an immediate object of action--yet, in the end, is measured through the *proxy* of the well-being of business and commerce.

But not so fast: *do* all conventional RED theorists make such a conflation between business growth and human well-being? An examination of Stimson, Stough and Roberts' work appears initially to demonstrate the contrary. For them, economic development "is concerned with more than labour, capital, prices and production. It is concerned with mobilizing social capital... In this context, economic development refers to increases in the quality of life associated with changes but not necessarily increases in the size and composition of population, in the quantity and nature of local jobs, and in the quantity of prices of goods and services produced locally" (2006, 5). Well-being is de-linked from a necessary connection with business or employment growth.

Yet though Stimson, Stough and Roberts seem to beckon towards an alternative regional development approach in which RED is understood not simply as a business-growth strategy but also "as a vehicle for preserving nature and a sense of place, empowering individuals and groups, exerting leadership, and as a vehicle for achieving

equity and distributive goals" (2006, 34), the effective core of their text remains substantially wedded to the more conventional pathways. As we shall see in further detail below, the authors depart quickly (almost immediately, in fact) from their own expanded definition by proposing metrics and analytical tools that reproduce an economic ontology quite similar to that of other conventional RED scholars: the activity that is visibilized, measured and placed at the heart of conceptual systems of economic analysis and evaluation is monetized business activity that produces commodities for sale in regional and extra-regional markets.<sup>17</sup> This is precisely why we cannot engage with a critical analysis of RED simply at the level of the field's self-definitions-- we must ask, rather, what these definitions *assume* and, through these assumptions, help to *perform*.

It should be no surprise that a definition of "the economy" itself is absent from most conventional definitions of RED.<sup>18</sup> These definitions are clearly discourses about the *economic*, and are clearly situated amidst some set of assumptions about the nature of a domain called "the economy," but the precise elaboration of this economy as an ontological claim is never made apparent. As Hudson writes, "for much of the time and for many people, the definition of regional economic development is a non-issue: the meaning and substance of 'the economy' is seen as self-evident. The development of a regional economy is defined by growth in output, especially productivity and output per caput, and if this is accompanied by some growth in employment, so much the better"

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17 Despite various moments of acknowledgement towards other values and dynamics in regional development, Stimson, Stough and Roberts ultimately reduce their focus to the following, framed through policy: "Regional economic development policy is basically about the allocation or reallocation of resource to enhance the economic performance of industries" (2006, 105).

18 Stimson, Stough and Roberts (2006), for example, never once ask the question "what is an economy?" nor do they engage in any inquiry regarding the nature of economic institutions or the various forms that they might take.



(Hudson 2007, 1156). The definitions offered by conventional RED regarding its own theory and practice are thus situated at the *ontic* level: given an "economy," given people in need of money and employment to secure their well-being, given an assumed need for growth (in various forms), and given the measure of wealth in primarily monetized terms (among other assumptions), these definitions come to appear as reasonable engagements with "economic reality."

What would it mean for us to question the givenness of this reality? What would we find if we were to peel back these ontic definitions to examine the assumptions about the nature of the world that lie beneath? As Caliskan and Callon point out, "one cannot qualify an economic theory without at some point mobilizing a theory that defines what is meant by economy" (Caliskan and Callon 2009, 371). What is meant by "economy" in conventional regional economic development? While my most robust attempt at an answer can only be found in the sum total of my engagement with these texts, I find it helpful to ask the question in parts: first, what is "the economy" as a field of being? By what (and from what) is it distinguished amidst the chaos and interrelatedness of the world? Second, what is it made of? What are its parts and who are its actors? Third, how does it work? What are its dynamics and patterns of operation? The first question is one of *economic ontology*--that is, an ontology that specifically posits the existence of something called "the economy" and elaborates on its nature and context; the second and third questions engage what we might call the *ontology of the economic*: given "the economy," what is it made of and how does it work?

### *What Is "The Economy" For Conventional RED?*

If it sounds somewhat banal or unnecessary to dwell on the fact that conventional RED assumes the existence of something called "the economy," this is due to the profound discursive power of the historical construct. As shown by numerous scholars (Buck-Morss 1995; Krohn 2002; Mitchell 1998; Schabas 2005), "the economy" as a domain of being emerged as an idea and experience only since the mid-19th century and took its most current form in the mid-20th. Contemporary RED--like nearly all of economic scholarship and practice--takes this construct as a natural given: there is an "economy," and this economy is distinct from other dimensions of reality. The very discourse of "economic development" presumes (and requires) this: for conventional RED practice to discuss, measure and manipulate "the economy," its object must be constituted as something which is, in fact, discussable, measurable and manipulable.

Conventional RED can be said to employ what Glyn Daly characterizes as "economism," a discursive practice that "possesses as its fundamental reference point a conception of the economy as an autonomous and rational structure" (1991, 81). Understood as an independent domain with its own set of dynamics, rules and elements, the economy thus becomes a specific and coherent object of analysis upon which researchers can bring to bear analytical tools of calculation and measurement, an object of intervention which can be "developed," grown, and transformed, and a body upon which policymakers can *act* through specifically "economic" policy. "The economy," writes Daly, "exists as a conceptual model which can be pre-specified, as an underlying

structure of 'rationality', and around which a causal topography of the social may be logically constructed" (1991, 81).

The *scale* of this discursive entity is an important element of its constitution and plays a key role in determining how "the economy" is figured at the level of the *region* in conventional RED. As Mitchell has shown, a fully coherent, bounded and measurable domain known as the economy did not appear until the 1930s with the publication of Keynes' *The General Theory* and Simon Kuznets' development of national accounts (1998, 89). Thus a notion of "the economy" appeared first and foremost as synonymous with "the national economy," constituted and reinforced continually by processes of measurement and by national-scale institutions that participated in its performance. In such a context, "regional economies" appeared as networks of dynamics located entirely *within*--and thus in some significant sense subordinated to--the larger economic whole. For a variety of reasons--lack of regional economic measurements, lack of regional economic governance institutions, and commerce clause restrictions against regional and state-level trade protection policy among others--the notion of a *regional economy* has appeared as a kind of shadow entity, a smaller-scale, weaker, more fluid portion of the "larger" (national) economy.

"The economy," constituted as a national-scale object and modeled as possessing systematic, law-like characteristics, thus becomes the fundamental model to which regional economies must conform. Regions that are "most like" the larger-scale standard aggregate are seen as "developed," while all other regions are backward, or "underdeveloped" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 257). Hudson raises this issue as well in the

context of identifying the common equation of regional development with economic growth: "Given this rather emaciated and limited mainstream definition of economic development, it is important to recognize that many regions are doomed to under-perform against centrally-set targets and in relation to national growth rates" (2007a, 1153).

It is not simply national economies, however, that set the standard for regional economic development. In the post-Bretton Woods era, processes similar to those that constituted "national economies" (and drawing initially, at least, on the same Keynesian macroeconomic tools, only later shifting to a more neoclassical/neoliberal framework) worked to secure the discursive stability of a new and much larger entity known as the "global economy." With the boundaries of the autonomous, self-constituted and rationally-structured economy now expanded to the planetary scale, national economies are positioned in a relationship analogous to the prior place of the *region*: dynamics operating at the scale of "the whole economy" are easily posed as demanding, constraining, or determinate of policy and possibility at the national scale. Regional economies appear, in such a nested structure, to be doubly-subordinate: first measured in relation to national economies, and second reduced to defensive and adaptive positions in relation to a much more unstable (yet still coherent and bounded) global economy.

This multi-level "regional subjection" (Gibson 2001) is made clear in the conventional RED literature. For Stimson, Stough and Roberts, regions face an uncertain environment and many "are not re-equipping themselves fast enough to compete effectively in the global age of business and technology of the post-industrial economy" (2006, 11). We find here a narrative of changing economic conditions--associated with

changes in the "global economy"--into which regions must fit and to which regions must learn to adapt: "Changes in the world economy [are] determinants of regional performance" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 14). Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller place a similar emphasis on subordinate place of regional economies in relation to the global: "Development can be initiated by external shocks...which create disequilibrium and disruption in the economy that require some type of institutional or structural adjustment. The goal of development policy is less on preventing such impacts and more on enhancing the economy's capacity to respond" (2004, 4). These are narratives of subordination and reaction in which regional economies can never appear as strong, coherent, and self-constituting in themselves, but rather must respond as if located within the enclosure of the much larger "economic system as a whole" (Mitchell 1998, 89, citing Keynes). "More often than not, regions and localities struggle to adapt their economic fabric to the emergent conditions" (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney 2006, 8).

The apparently ahistorical, self-bounded unity of the "economic system as a whole" does not stand alone. It is one sphere of a classic and often taken-for-granted ontological trinity. For much of conventional RED--as with most social, political and economic thought generally--the world is made of *economy*, *society* and *nature*. Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller are explicit about this division, contending that "the economic" is distinct from "the social-political-environmental dimensions" of a community or region (2004, 2). This distinction makes possible the claim that "value judgments concerning social welfare should remain in the realm of politics, not economics" (2004, 9). In the work of Bendavid-Val, the distinction is rendered visible in terms of criteria for

successful regional development projects: they must "meet tests of technical feasibility, economic viability, environmental sustainability, and social acceptability" (1991, 22). Here, the economic is appears as the limit of possibility (via "viability"), nature as a source of inputs to be maintained ("sustainability") and society as an ethical arbiter of the good ("acceptability"). In Stimson, Stough and Roberts, the economy, society and nature distinction becomes visible at the *margins* where a singular emphasis on economy is (somewhat) challenged by the introduction of other considerations into economic development theory. These are the all-too-familiar articulations of the "*triple-bottom-line*, i.e., a concern with environmental, economic and social outcomes" (2006, 87) and the "three forms of capital"--economic, social and environmental (2006, 90).

It is only in the context of these three dimensions that the precise nature of "the economic"--along with its ethical and political effects--can be understood. As the "constitutive outside" of the economy, the social and natural domains form the non-economic context and Other of the economic domain. Mitchell notes that "to fix a self contained sphere like the economy requires not only methods of counting everything within it, but also and perhaps more importantly, some method of excluding what does not belong...to create the economy [is] to create the non-economic" (1998, 92). This non-economic in conventional RED, we shall see, is conceptualized as a realm of resources and as a background-context which feeds--but does not ultimately determine, constrain, or subordinate the powerful presence of the economy.

To the extent that ecological relations and nonhuman beings--nature--appear *overtly* in the work of Stimson, Stough and Roberts, they appear primarily as "resource

endowments" which contribute to the increased competitiveness of a region if mobilized properly--including "sustainably" (2006, 329). In Shaffer, Deller and Marcoullier's work, the more-than-human world figures similarly as a domain of "resources," defined as "the primary factors used in production...that the community uses to produce output" (2004, 6). This includes the generic and undifferentiated category of "land"--subsuming, presumably, all dimensions of primary ecological production (photosynthesis) and fertility--which is defined simply as "the finite resource on which production activities take place" (2004, 7) and "a critical production input" (2004, 81). The *social* is also presented in these texts as a resource, most often in the form of "social capital," a generative source of investment capital (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 8) or a pool of inputs to the "architecture of the regional future" (2006, 197). In both cases, a world of interrelationships is not only split into analytically-separate parts but divided into an *active* (economy) and *passive* (society and nature) relationship familiar to those who have studied the role of subject/object binaries in undergirding multiple forms of oppression and exploitation (see, for example, Plumwood 1993).

Ecological and social relationships are also subsumed within conventional RED by a notion of "amenities," collectively defined as "cultural, historic, natural or built environmental resources that increasingly contribute to our notion of quality of life" (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 7).<sup>19</sup> In this conception, the beings and

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19 A variety of amenity forms are acknowledged (those with direct and indirect use values, and those with "non-use values"), yet these are all built around a set of key (problematic) centers: (1) they are all reduced to human uses (even the "non-use values" are those things which are valuable to humans through non-use); and (2) they are all reduced, ultimately, to the question of utility, preferences and market values. These "nonmarket values" are seen primarily through the lens of their instrumental roles in shaping market values in a given community or region (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 157).

relationships constituting society and nature are positioned not as resource inputs for production, but rather as supporting background contexts within which economic development plays out. As amenities, these constitutive interrelationships appear as pleasant sources of attraction that might add value to a given process of economic growth (or, in their absence, might hinder such a process) (Green 2001); that might increase the competitiveness of a region by providing a more appealing stage upon which economic drama can unfold (Rogerson 1999; Wojan and McGranahan 2007); that may "reduce transaction costs" and thus enhance economic activity (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 321); or may even be transformable into resources (sustainably, of course) for commodity production.<sup>20</sup> The notion of a "regional milieu," found extensively throughout recent work on the role of innovation and "knowledge spillovers" in enhancing regional economic competitiveness, is often a more nuanced and robust--but ultimately similar--version of the amenity approach to social and ecological relations (Amin 1999).

In all of these conceptualizations, the economic is foregrounded as the active, productive force against a background of passive objects or instrumentalized relationships. Despite the occasional invocation of a "triple-bottom-line," Stimson, Stough and Roberts build their core discourse and analysis around only the economic node of this trinity. It is one thing to invoke a valuation of the economic, social and

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<sup>20</sup> Tourism is an example of the commodification of "amenities." It is interesting to note here as well that there is an important tension between the resource conception of society and nature and the amenity conception: while resources and amenities both figure as crucial factors of production, the transformation of amenities into resources often jeopardizes the *amenity value* of the beings and relations involved. Too many tourists (i.e., too much transformation of amenity to resource) undermine the very base upon which the commodification was built. This tension plays out continually in rural areas (the Plum Creek example is a case in point). Yet note also that the tension is itself built on a shared ontological ground in which both resources and amenities have both been constituted as value-sources in relation to a dynamic, demanding economy.



natural; it is quite another to enact this in analytical models of regional development.

When the substantive questions are asked and the numbers are gathered and stacked in columns, it is the "economic"--specifically constituted by measurements of wages, jobs, productivity and aggregate regional growth--that stands at the center of the picture.

"Some constraint on the pursuit of economic values, particularly the quest for high economic growth, may be necessary in the short term," write Stimson, Stough and Roberts,"but it is unreasonable and unrealistic for societies to lower long-term economic aspirations" (2006, 218).

The discourse of the triple bottom line only serves, then, to obscure the fact that in a contest between the three domains, the *economic* stands most likely to prevail.

Ecological imperatives are acceptable so long as they can generate increased revenues for economic processes: hence the strong emphasis in recent regional development literature on what Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney call "ecological modernisation," including "the promotion of more efficient economic growth that uses fewer natural resources, regulated markets and using environmental practices as an economic driver" (2006, 115).

Social imperatives are important--as in Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller's acknowledgement of society as "a subtle background force that defines the norms, values and ethics that determine right from wrong, good from bad" (2004, 7)--but they are also constituted as soft and subjective (or "political") in contrast to the objective (measurable, calculable, predictable) necessities of the economic. It is, in the end, economic imperatives that rise to the top: "the overall purpose of community economic development policy is to reduce or abolish the barriers (economic, cultural, and/or

political) in product and factor markets that prevent the positive culmination of economic development processes" (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2006, 70).

There are at least two distinct critical responses that can be generated in relation to the tripartite ontological structure presented by conventional RED. The first approach might view the distinction itself as *constructed* but essentially innocent, placing critical emphasis on the ways in which the relation between the three realms has become imbalanced in contemporary economic development practice. Even if the ontological structure itself is revealed as a historical production (which, to be clear, it is *not* in Stimson, Stough and Roberts), the problem is seen in the domain of the *relations* among elements of the trinity. Stimson, Stough and Roberts allude to such a perspective in suggesting that the "primary objective of sustainable regional development will be to restore the equilibrium" between the economic, social and ecological realms (2006, 218).

Such an approach, however, does not sufficiently examine the politics of the ontological distinctions themselves. A second approach--one which I adopt--refuses to accept the innocence of economy, nature and society as categories. Far from being neutral tools for understanding differences in the world, these distinctions make slices through actual bodies and interrelationships in ways that enable and sustain the particular dominance of the economic as well as its associated forms of violence, exploitation and colonization.<sup>21</sup> "The economy," in enclosing its space of operation, externalizes all of the relationships, behaviors, rationalities and ethical dynamics that it wishes to ignore,

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<sup>21</sup> I say "enabled" rather than "caused" because these ethical effects are not *necessary* effects of an ontological separation of economy from other spheres of life--they are, rather, effects (over)determined by the specific historical, cultural, political, ecological (etc) context in which this separation is made. One could imagine (as I hope to do later in this thesis) ways of conceptualizing an "economy" that sustain very different ethical and political stances and relationships.

undermine or exploit to "society." Society, in a similar but broader move, builds its membrane by externalizing all people, species, relationships and dynamics that it wishes to exclude from ethical consideration and political deliberation to "nature." Nature, as the ultimate externality, serves a simultaneous role as the final ontological dump and the final ontological ground, both *resource* and *recourse*--on one hand, the place to which all excluded are banished to become resources or ghosts; on the other hand, the source of "objective" legitimation for any operation in the economic or social domains which someone seeks to render uncontestable by (of course) an operation of "naturalizing" (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995).<sup>22</sup>

We can see two emergent effects of these separations. First, the separation of economy as a sphere distinct from society and nature makes possible--and even plausible--the assertion that "value judgments concerning social welfare should remain in the realm of politics, not economics" (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 9). This is a common notion throughout mainstream economic literature, reflected in the distinction between "positive" and "normative" economics and a frequent injunction toward the former (Friedman 1970). In this way, categories that are inevitably linked with value practices (McMurtry 1998; De Angelis 2007) are able to generate knowledges of the world that render these practices effectively invisible behind a veil of apparent objectivity. Asserting the necessity of a particular form of economic development to improve well-being becomes simply a description of *what is* and *what must be* rather than a normative attempt to intervene in the world. This is particularly insidious since the

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22 As Latour describes: "the critical power of the moderns lies in this double language: they can mobilize Nature at the heart of social relationships, even as they leave Nature infinitely remote from human beings" (1993, 37).

"economic" effectively maintains an exclusive right to activities understood as crucial for the reproduction of contemporary life (i.e., jobs and money) and can therefore draw on the power of this claim while also presenting its process of knowledge production and intervention as "objective."

A second move enabled by the separation of an economic domain from all others is the erasure of a wide variety of fundamental life processes from view as legitimate and integral elements of human livelihoods. We have, on one side, *economy*--the domain where people "make a living"; while on the other side lies *society* (where people gain meaning, participate in culture, have relationships, make ethical judgments, etc.) and *nature* (from which we draw resources or gain benefits). The social and biophysical relationships--the *constitutive interrelationships*--that make life itself possible and form the primary basis for all activities that might be construed as economic are separated from the very domain that purports to examine how humans meet needs, satisfy wants and create well-being (i.e., "economics"). In this ontology, slicing across and through interconnections between and among humans and nonhumans, both nature and society are rendered variously--as we have seen in conventional RED--into collections of resources or sets of background "amenities" to be utilized.

The ontology of economy, society and nature that undergirds conventional RED (as well as much of the broader culture from which it emerges) effectively severs us--conceptually, materially, and experientially--from the responsibilities that our interrelationships as members of a community of life demand. When interrelationships become invisible, or when culturally-constructed dynamics are conceived as ontological

facts, then ethics becomes impossible. It is because the "economy" (which we all need) is seen as different from society that we can justify the violence done to our bodies and minds and hearts by the regime of coercive labor that we call "jobs." It is because the "economy" is seen as fundamentally different from nature that we can justify treating all other beings as resources (or ignoring them altogether) (Plumwood 2002) and end up with a system of livelihood that undermines our own conditions of existence and secures the ongoing violence of colonization (Fischer-Kowalski and Haberl 1998).<sup>23</sup>

### *The Structure of Economy in Conventional RED*

With this broad examination of economic ontology in mind, we can turn now to an exploration of the ways in which conventional RED presents ontologies of the economic--that is, the specific ways in which the domain of economy is itself constituted. What is the structure of "the economy"? Of what is this economy made? Who are its agents and actors? What kinds of actors and relationships are visible and invisible within conventional RED's notion of "the economy"? This inquiry is particularly important

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23 Such division has, arguably, enabled a vast and unprecedented mobilization and transformation of energy and resources on the part of certain humans. Yet it has done so, as Bruno Latour argues, not through the *actual* "separation of humans and nonhumans [or, in our case economy and nature] but, on the contrary, by the amplification of their contacts" (1993, 41). This is the paradox of the "modern constitution": that an overt, discursive separation of the world into these distinct domains actually enables never-before-seen forms of material transformation and combination. Precisely because nature is conceived as distinct and "objective," those who end up in its sphere--including other species, women, people of color, "uncivilized" cultures and other "others" at various times and in various configurations--can be treated as *objects* (Mellor 1997; Anderson 2000; Haraway 1991; Wolch & Emel 1998; Plumwood 1993, 2002). In combining objects, there are no rules and no ethics: hybrids--complex mixtures of "social" and "natural" elements-- can proliferate. Similarly, because economy is conceived as a distinct ontological sphere with inevitable "laws," "dynamics," and specific, "naturalized" rationalities (i.e., "economic man"), nearly any object can be brought into its grasp and transformed into a commodity, and nearly any form of social obligation, ethical consideration, or "noneconomic" production or exchange can be ignored, undermined or circumvented as an externality with no measurable existence within the economic sphere.

given the discursive power of the economic domain in conventional RED, for those structures, relationships and beings who don't make it into the realm of the legitimately "economic" are inevitably banished to the peripheral domains of society and nature.

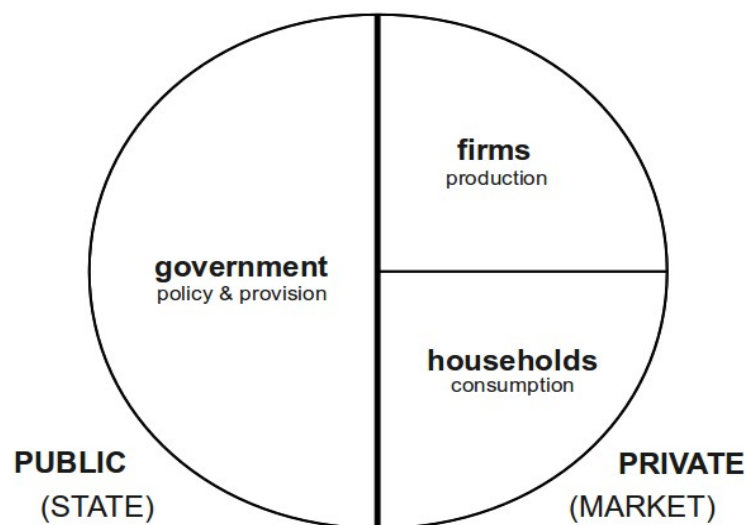
First, and most broadly, we encounter in conventional RED a general and common distinction: "The economy is composed of two parts: the public and private sectors" (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 167). The *public sector* is the domain of government, of the *state*, and is the location in which context-setting and rule-making policy, as well as the provision of "public goods," is enacted. The *private sector* is the domain of the *market*, in which various actors interact in wealth-generating cycles of production and consumption. The public/private distinction maps precisely onto the classic state/market distinction that is often portrayed in introductory microeconomics textbooks as poles representing the "two choices" of economic systems available to us: the "command system" and the "market system", otherwise known as capitalism and communism (or socialism). In the case of the public/private framing of the binary, however, it appears possible that both state and market elements might co-exist within a single economy. For conventional RED, which places a strong emphasis on the role of public policy and government institutions (among others) in organizing, facilitating or funding economic development interventions, this is a crucial marriage. I will explore some of the tensions that play out in this conception further below.

There is a second split in the structure of economy that is central to conventional RED thought, and this can be represented in a number of ways. Within the domain of the private or market sphere, economic activity is divided between firms and households

(Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 60). Firms are posed as the active sites of production, the generative spheres of economic life in which goods and services--as well as that holy grail of conventional RED, "jobs"--are created and distributed to a citizenry in need. Households (posed as an undifferentiated aggregate), on the other hand, are the domain of consumption. While they do provide labor for firms, this activity is still centered around the firms themselves. Productive, non-firm-centered activity in the household is utterly invisible within this ontology of economy. On one level, a familiar tension plays out around this binary within the conventional RED literature as well as in the domain of active policy (this was noted, in some form, in the "definitions" section earlier): should economic development focus its policy interventions on firms or on households? Should emphasis be placed on industrial attraction or on workforce development? In practice, as a number of researchers have shown, a vast majority of regional economic development work is expended on the *firm* side of the binary (Rubin 1988; Levy 1990; Meyer 1991; Reese and Fassenfest 1996; Wolman and Spitzley 1996). Indeed, as Stimson, Stough and Roberts ultimately confess, "regional economic development policy is basically about the allocation or reallocation of resource to enhance the economic performance of industries" (2006, 105).

We can thus conceive of the ontological structure of the conventional RED economy as a dual set of bifurcations (Figure 1): first, the public/private or state/market, and second, the firm/household (producer/consumer or employer/employee). This is not, however, a matter of simple divisions for purposes of understanding. Both sets of divisions operate in a manner akin to what Plumwood characterizes as a structure of

hierarchical dualism in which one term become the "master" to which the other is subordinate. "A dualism is more than a relation of dichotomy," she writes. "In dualistic construction, as in hierarchy, the qualities (actual or supposed), the culture, the values and the areas of life associated with the dualised other are systematically and pervasively constructed and depicted as inferior" (1993, 47). The term "inferior" may or may not quite reflect the dynamic in the conventional approach to public/private and firm/household, but the hierarchy of the dual structure is certainly operative. While each half of the pie is necessary to the overall picture, it is *firms operating in the private sector* that rise to the top as the primary players in economic life and as the fundamental drivers of regional growth and development.



**Figure 1: The Twice-Bifurcated Structure of Economy in Conventional RED.**

We can see this dualism playing out dramatically in the way that the public side of the binary nearly disappears (after an initial introduction) from many conventional RED



texts. When presenting a *broad* view of the economy as constituted by the public/private binary, it appears that both state and market constitute the economic landscape for conventional RED; yet the discourse immediately slips from this dual structure into something more singular in which the state is banished to the "outside" of the economy. Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller's presentation of the binary itself hints at this dynamic:

The economy is composed of two parts: the public and private sectors. In most discussions of economics, we tend to focus on the private sector, which is composed of businesses and consumers interacting in the market. Market forces affecting both the supply and the demand sides drive the economy to determine what goods to produce and what prices to charge... What is often overlooked in these economic discussions is the role of the public sector (2004, 167).

The state/public sector is, here, an add-on, often neglected in definitions of economy but crucial to the picture nonetheless. Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller reveal the very bias they critique, proposing elsewhere that "the basic factors involved in community economics revolve around consumers (households) and business interests (firms)" (2004, 60). Indeed, while the public/private concept is used when convenient (as in "public/private partnerships"),<sup>24</sup> the default stance of much conventional RED is to reduce the economic terrain to the private market realm alone. Thus the economy becomes the "market economy" and it becomes possible to subsume even the provision of public goods under this rubric: "the purpose of a market economy is to allocate scarce resources of society across private and public goods and services in a manner that maximizes the well-being of citizens within that economy" (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 318).

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<sup>24</sup> Even within this public/private discourse, the public sector is often posed as somewhat outside of the domain of the real economy, lurking on the edges to shape the "environment" in which the private sector operates. It is the private sector that engages in *real* production. Thus the influence of the public sector on the private can be framed as "netural, negative, or positive" in its contribution to the "business climate".

General discourse about the economy aside, when many writers in conventional RED present practical *tools* for measuring regional economic activity, it is specifically *market activity* (more precisely, *firm-centered* market activity) upon which their gaze focuses. Stimson, Stough and Roberts, for example, highlight the importance of engaging in "regional profiling" through "data gathering and analysis in a regional audit" (2006, 63). What data should be gathered? The authors suggest that success in regional development must be measured in terms of: "the degree to which economic activity and employment in a region is related to serving local demand as against serving demand external to the region (i.e. exports);... a region's overall performance relative to that of other regions;... which industry sectors are performing better in the region;... [and] a given sector's efficiency relative to other industry sectors' performance in the region" (2006, 105). In a similar vein, Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller propose that "the economy is a system of human activity directed toward meeting human wants by the deliberate allocation of scarce resources. Generally, this means that you are concerned about monetized economic returns" (2004, 17).

Conventional RED enacts, in this way, what Karl Polanyi calls the "economistic fallacy," the reduction of economic inquiry and discourse to a narrow focus on monetized markets at the exclusion of all else. "A broad, generic phenomenon," he writes with regard to the history of "formalist" economic thought, "was somehow taken to be identical with a species with which we happen to be familiar. In such terms, the error was in equating the human economy in general with its market form" (Polanyi 1977, 6).<sup>25</sup> To

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25 Said differently, the fallacy refers to "the practice of analyzing all economic systems through a theoretical gaze that presumes that the horizons of economy are fully comprehended by a map that includes only market exchange and the calculative behavior couplet" (Adaman and Madra 2002, 1046).

the extent that market economies are considered synonymous with capitalism (a common equation), Gibson-Graham's critique of "capitalocentrism" can be seen as a version of Polanyi's critique. In a capitalocentric discourse, "capitalism which is actually a specific economic form becomes the very model or definition of economy. By virtue of their differences from capitalism all other forms of economy fail to conform to true economic specifications" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 35). To the extent that they appear as visible at all, "other forms of economy (not to mention noneconomic aspects of social life) are...understood primarily with reference to capitalism: as being fundamentally the same as (or modeled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations; as being opposite to capitalism; as being the complement of capitalism; as existing in capitalism's space or orbit" (2006a, 6).<sup>26</sup> While avoiding use of the term "capitalism," discourses of conventional RED fall precisely into this capital- and market- centered trap.

In Conventional RED *markets* form the core identity of the economy. By implication, this also means that only commodified exchange relationships--market relationships mediated by money--count as legitimate forms of economic activity. "Why

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26 Even in the rare instance where non-mainstream institutions and forms of economic activity are recognized within conventional RED, they are instrumentalized as pathways to a formal marketized business model. Bradshaw and Winn, for example, note that "certain people outside the mainstream economy are in fact contributing to employment and generating wealth in a sustainable manner" (2000, 112). Highlighting practices of gleaning, energy conservation activism and "DIY" strawbale construction practices, they suggest that alternative practices offer ideas for marketized business activities. Gleaning, for example, is seen as "a model for sustainable economic development because they show how waste recovery and marketing can be an economically viable resource for creating jobs and improving the environment at the same time" (2000, 117), thus "economic developers can utilize third wave techniques to promote waste recycling and create jobs" (2000, 118). No consideration is given to the fact that gleaning is non-market activity (and thus may or may not even indicate what the authors wish to prove regarding marketability) that cannot be reduced to "job creation" and--perhaps even more importantly--could itself be destroyed as a practice were its "commons" enclosed. Indeed, were Bradshaw and Winn's visions to come to fruition, numerous DIY practices of non-market subsistence could be enclosed, commodified and their practices effectively destroyed or undermined. All because of a failure to understand that economics is not--and cannot--be reduced to money and jobs!

is it," asks Williams, "that most studies of regional economic development and policy focus upon the private commodified sphere in particular and formal employment more generally? It is widely believed that this commodified realm is not only the expanding sphere but also the lead sector upon which all the other spheres of economic practice are dependent" (2005, 16). Massey elaborates with a similar question and answer:

What is the necessary cornerstone of the economy? The answer given is private profit. That only what is profitable to the private sector is wealth-creating; that only on the basis of profits once made can other things, such as non-profit-making services, be afforded. Specifically, without profit made from marketed goods and services, no surplus can be generated and non non-marketed goods and services, therefore, can be provided" (1988, 249).

This is an ontological move within conventional RED (if a questionably conscious set of omissions can be said to constitute a "move" at all) that has significant implications for the landscape of economic imagination in regional development practice. If markets--and as a result only monetized transactions--are the only visible and legitimated form of economic activity, then the toolbox, the "economic imaginary" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 121), available to people in a given region is profoundly restricted.

This constraint or narrowing appears first within the monetized domain, in the form of a powerful network of theorizations and material relations that constitute the "rules" of markets and then proceed to naturalize these rules as "laws" (Callon 1998; Miller and Carrier 1998; Mitchell 2005). This discourse of "laws" appears, then, to delineate the boundaries of the viable and possible for enterprises operating within monetized markets. "Efficiency" and "the bottom line" rule the discursive day. Imagination, creativity and even social desire and need run up against the "reality" of the hard numbers of a demanding and unyielding economy (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 27).

Such limitations imposed on the marketized and monetized realm by such a discourse pale in comparison, however, to those placed upon all other (nonmonetized and nonmarket) forms of livelihood activity. This is a difficult issue to even *raise* within the world generated by such discourse, since the terrain of the economic has been closed to any form of social or ecological production, allocation or provision that does not appear as exchangeable in terms of a monetary general equivalence. Despite the fact that numerous researchers have shown nonmarket and nonmonetized forms of exchange as accounting for more than half (and up to at least three quarters) of all exchange activity in industrialized nations (Gibson-Graham 2006b; Stodder 2002; Waring 1990; Williams 2005), these domains remain hidden, marginalized and thus devalued as key elements of an economic development imaginary. Brandt calls this marginalization "economic invisibility," describing that "many activities essential for human well-being are not officially considered part of the economy" (1995, 3). It is not just human dimensions of well-being that are excluded from the economy (and thus from the discursive power the economy wields)--the entire network of interrelationships that constitutes and perpetuates *life itself* is excluded as well (Daly 1996; Hall et al. 2001; Krohn 2002). As we have seen earlier, society and nature are relegated to a constitutive (colonized, mined, manipulated, parasitized, albeit often romanticized and longed-for) *outside* to the active, powerful, supposedly life-giving domain of the economy.

All of these exclusions via a market-centered, economicist (or capitalocentric) discourse work collectively to constrict the array of possibilities imagined and presented for regional economic development.<sup>27</sup> Hudson summarizes:

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<sup>27</sup> Clearly, this restriction benefits certain parties much more than others. It is beyond the scope of this

Defining ‘development’ in terms of gross domestic product...squeezes out consideration of a range of social economy approaches, from ‘near market’ social enterprises to more traditional voluntary sector charities that have the capacity to create socially useful work, producing socially useful products and services, but within metrics other than those of the mainstream economy. While surpluses may be produced, they do not become profits – they may be expressed in metrics such as units of time, for example, or distributed via non-monetary exchange. Eliminating such activities from the definition of ‘economy’ is a quite critical manoeuvre, as such activities are often proportionally of greater importance in regions that have become peripheral" (2007a, 156-157).

It is precisely this constriction that enables the conditions under which Plum Creek can claim to offer the only viable solution to regional economic need or under which the attraction of a private, for-profit prison to a small Maine town can appear as an attractive option. The centering of markets and of monetized market exchange in conventional RED is accomplished at the cost of--and, arguably, sometimes for the very purpose of<sup>f28</sup>--excluding thousands of other options available to (and already practiced by) human communities in the construction of healthy, responsible livelihoods.

The exclusions and empowerments enabled and sustained by the hierarchized binary of the public/private economy are reinforced by the second binary of conventional RED--that of the firm and the household in its various forms. Positioned within the domain of the market--as two categories of key actors engaged in relations of exchange--firms and households are understood to interact on both the level of labor markets (as the employer/employee relationship) and goods and services markets (as producers and consumers). While it is theoretically possible to understand such interactions as

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thesis to explore the dynamics of such benefit (and cost), but I would be remiss if I did not point out that someone is (often quite literally) making a killing--and getting away with it--from the production of such economic ontologies.

28 "'We've got nothing else in the hopper here,' says Milo [Maine] Town Manager Jim Gahagan. 'It really could make a difference in our area.'" (Farwell 2010).

relationships between two equally constitutive and influential parties, the effect of much conventional RED discourse is to construct precisely the kind of active/passive, strong/weak, centered/marginal binary that is enacted in the public/private or state/market conception. Despite the category "household" referring to the very human beings who make up the population of a given region and whose dreams, aspirations, desires and needs should be formative in its development, it is the *firm* that we find centered in conventional RED literature.

Positioned as the active, productive entities, the engines of growth and development, and the primary nodes of linkage with other regions and the larger world, firms are clearly the stars of the conventional RED show. It is firms that are analytically broken down into multiple categories of differentiation in input-output tables, while "households" remain a nebulous, under-specified category (Bendavid-Val 1991; Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006); it is firms whose location decisions are scrutinized, theorized, and predicted in shift-share and location quotient analyses and in industry cluster studies (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 246); it is firms whose activities are seen as key drivers and determinants of regional economic development in economic base theory and analysis (Bendavid-Val 1991; Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004; Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006). When the term "private sector" is invoked, in fact, it most often has no bearing on households--private means private *enterprise*, firms, businesses (Bendavid-Val 1991, 22). To the extent that *people* appear at all in most conventional RED literature that I have examined, they appear as a public in need of convincing (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 72), as aggregated consumers of goods and services (2006, 157) or as

actual, potential or failed employees--a sought-after pool of "skilled and adaptable human resources" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 251)

We see here, then, a discourse which not only reduces the economy to the domain of the market and monetized exchange, but at the same time elevates one side of a binarized market relationship--"business interests"--over and above the other. Even if the authors of conventional RED do not consciously wish to claim that employers are more important than workers, or that regional production should be prioritized over regional use or consumption, the effect of their analytic discourse is to sustain precisely such politics at the ontological level. Such a discourse--taught to professional economic developers--may help to explain why, for example, it is much more common to find economic developers collaborating with regional chambers of commerce than with regional labor councils (for a rare exception to this trend, see Whalen 2007). And it helps us to understand why and how, in our earlier exploration of the self-conscious definitions of regional economic development presented by conventional RED theorists, the well-being of people so often appears as inextricably bound to a specific notion of the well-being of business. Once again, the economic imaginary is restricted by an ontology that suggests as useful, viable and desirable only a narrow range of interventions.

### *Economic Dynamics in Conventional RED*

The process of generating a politics of narrow economic possibility is supported and strengthened by a theorization of economic *necessity*. As described earlier, the economy is understood in conventional RED as a kind of self-constituted, systematic and



dynamic domain of being which can be measured, analyzed, and managed (within limits and amidst acknowledged inevitable uncertainty). I have thus far only explored the ontologies of such an economy's structure and contents; I turn now to an examination of the *dynamics* which are seen by conventional RED to animate and constitute such a structure. How does the economy work? What does it do and what does it demand of those who live within it and engage it? This is the final piece of the ontological puzzle that makes conventional RED tick and that makes the executives and stockholders of Plum Creek and for-profit prison corporations both smile and sweat.

The market, as the animus of the ontological space of economy, appears in conventional RED as a kind of universal force--omnipresent and (with the exception of a few "market failures" here and there) omnipotent. "Market conditions" appear as if a natural phenomenon, a context-making presence to which regions must learn to respond and adapt if they are to survive and thrive. In the work of Stimson, Stough and Roberts in particular, market forces appear to be universalized across the space of the globe itself, such that just as regions in the U.S. or Australia must learn to adapt, so too must "Vietnam and Indonesia in South East Asia...struggle to understand how to restructure provincial and regional economies to operate under open and competitive market conditions" (2006, 10).<sup>29</sup> The "global economy," like a planetary economic snow globe, is the ultimate environment in which all else is situated. "Changes in the world economy [are] determinants of regional performance" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 14).

Such a narrative is not restricted to even the "mainstream" of regional economic

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<sup>29</sup> This universalism shows itself immediately, however, to be a *project* rather than a natural reality when the authors note that many of the practices required of regions to adapt to "open and competitive market conditions" are, in fact, "foreign and clash with previous governance structures and institutional cultures" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 10).

development; Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney, whose discourse is often significantly broader and more self-reflective than that of most conventional RED, still contend that, "with an increasingly dominant and pervasive capitalist global economy, an increased capacity to respond and adjust to global challenges necessarily implies endowing individuals, firms and territories with the factors that will allow them to place their skills, products or services in the global marketplace and to compete with others" (2006, 12).

All of this discourse of the inevitable global market works to position regions as essentially in need of "global integration" and such integration as inherently positive. "It is important for regional economic development strategy to be cognizant of the global context," write Stimson, Stough and Roberts, "and to develop local actions that will facilitate integration with the global economy" (2006, 39). Maliza and Feser are even more forthright: "For most U.S. localities, building links to the global economy is more feasible and desirable (if not unavoidable) than separation and autarky" (1999, 19). Such an approach assumes that fundamental issues such as the ecological impact of globalized economic trading and production relations is negligible, imminently solvable or worth ignoring; that the benefit of regions to increasing their exposure to global volatility and economic dependence on internationally-networked (i.e., not locally-owned or controlled or rooted or concerned) entities and relations outweighs the tremendous potential costs; that the social relations generated and enforced by "integration" are desired and helpful to a region's or community's livelihood aspirations or values; that the current "status quo" of global transport, cheap energy, relative international peace, constitutive legal structures (etc) are all elements to be relied upon and assumed long into the future--in other words,

that no "insurance policy" or caution is fundamentally necessary. This discourse also assumes that regional economic development experts "know best," and that regions seeking to carve out other pathways are little more than naive and parochial dreamers.

The universal market as a natural and inevitable force is presented with at least two distinct--yet often interwoven--regimes of imagery. In the first, market forces are analogous to the weather or climate, as when Maliza writes about a "a good business climate" (1994, 84) or when Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller compare regional economic development analysts to meteorologists (2004, 184). The market appears here as an external and uncertain nature-like force that compels regions and regional developers to take necessary adaptive action. The second image, while maintaining a sense of inevitability, is somewhat different. Through a discourse about "impediments" to healthy market functioning and successful regional development, the market is posed as a potentially beneficent flow of goods and services, a longed-for river of development whose course can be more or less obstructed by regional policies and whose rushing waters--if set free from constraint--might nourish all. Rubin suggests in this vein, for example, that regions and cities need to be "flexible enough with codes and regulations so as not to hamper business development" (1988, 35). Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller exemplify this approach when they propose that, "the overall purpose of community economic development policy is to reduce or abolish the barriers (economic, cultural, and/or political) in product and factor markets that prevent the positive culmination of economic development processes" (2006, 70).<sup>30</sup> This is a neoliberal vision *par excellence*:

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30 This common discourse assumes a naturalized "market" with law-like dynamics that can be impeded. What may actually be going on here is a naturalization process by which, instead of certain activities or dynamics marking the limits of market theory itself, the theory is reified through the framing of these limits as an "impediment" to the (presumably law-like) functioning of that which is theorized. .

"over the long run, competitive market forces create an optimal spatial distribution of economic activity by selecting those production sites most profitable for the market served" (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 59).

Whether portrayed as a weather system calling for adaptation or a flow of benevolence seeking freedom, there is a kind of economic teleology built into conventional RED's conceptions of markets and market forces. We are led to believe (or to simply assume) that "globalization" is both inevitable and progressive; that it will continue to march "forward" and that regions unable to (or refusing to) integrate and adapt will be "left behind" in this linear process. Gibson-Graham's metaphorical invocation of evolutionary biology is instructive here: as in certain strands of biological discourse, where species are seen to progress in singular fashion from simple to complex and only the most adapted and superior species are thought to survive, so "economic evolution has become a story of the progressive emergence of ever more efficient, more competitive, and therefore dominant forms of capitalist enterprise, technology and economic organization" (2006a, 115). Such a representation of linear evolution "has the effect of reducing eco(nomic)-diversity" (2006a, 115). The focus on regional competition leads, in fact, toward a focus not on "what kind of a world do we want to live in?" or "how can we create resilient, strong, ethical livelihoods?" but rather one of seeking to position for future competitive advantage: "to learn to anticipate the future in terms of probable outcomes and to develop strategies suitable for managing them" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 199). Possibility gives way to constraint and necessity.

Necessity for what? Conventional RED positions regions as spaces and communities forced to *grow* and *compete*. Nearly all of the conventional theories of regional development--despite their substantial differences--are, at core, explanatory theories that seek to identify the sources and processes that generate or hinder economic growth (or increase or decrease competitiveness in the service of such growth) as measured by various quantitative indicators such as employment, productivity, output or aggregate regional wealth. Were we, equipped with conventional RED theory, to enter a process of regional development in which growth and competition were not assumed to be either the primary dynamics at work nor the primary goals of the development process, we would be vastly disappointed and ill-prepared for accomplishing any real work on the ground.<sup>31</sup> The theories, and the tools that they generate, have these dynamics built-in from the very outset. Development *means* growth and competition. To refuse such dynamics is to refuse to engage in the development process itself.

Although significant work, even in the mainstream literature, has been done to construct an analytical differentiation between development and growth (Flammang 1979; 1990; Maliza and Feser 1999), the two concepts remain synonymous in much writing on regional economic development. Stimson, Stough and Roberts, for example--despite, early in their text, specifically defining regional economic development as a process that cannot be reduced to a measure of quantitative growth (2006, 6)--end up

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31 This is not to say that these theories are bad or of little value. In a context in which the growth of conventionally-measured indicators was the primary goal of development practice, combinations of these theories would be extremely useful to help identify points of transformation and strategic leverage. It is not the work of this paper to explore these uses. Rather, I am "stepping back" and asking more broadly about regional development as a non-determinate process of the collective construction of livelihoods which may or may not involve strictly-defined economic growth dynamics. An *even when such dynamics are present, they are unlikely to be the only dynamics present* and so a focus on them exclusively may have problematic implications for the broader prospects of regional well-being.

using the two terms interchangeably throughout the majority of their work. For Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller, the very definition of development has growth built into it: "development is sustained progressive change to attain individual and group interests through expanded, intensified, and adjusted use of resources" (2004, 3). To be clear, the authors *do* make a distinction between "growth" and "development," but while growth is seen as "more of the same: more jobs, more income, more people, or more real estate transactions," development is seen as a broader qualitative change of which growth remains an integral part (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 4). In both cases, the implication is that "economic growth is necessary for development to occur. In one sense, development speaks to how economic growth is allocated across economic agents. Without a dynamic and growing economy, it is difficult to consider issues related to development" (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 20). Hudson summarizes such logic effectively: "In other words, regional economic development is defined as regional economic growth, and growth in the mainstream formal economy at that" (2007a, 1156).

The primacy of growth in conventional RED can be seen concretely in the analytical tools utilized by developers and development scholars. Shift-share analysis, for example, is focused on measuring regional and industry growth relative to other regions and thus narrows its view of economy to the domains of employment levels and labor productivity (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 125). Data envelopment analysis "differentiates between industry sectors on the basis of their relative productivity in comparison to other regional sectors so as to ascertain regional competitiveness" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 144). Input-Output analysis is more analytically

interesting, since it seeks to model interdependencies between industries within and outside of a given region. Such an approach allows one to "map" the connections and the potential effects that various changes might have across diverse, linked industries. Yet the limits to this model (in its conventional applications, at least) are also clear: it measures interrelationship only in terms of monetized transactions between and among households, firms, government and the "outside world" (beyond the region being modeled). Thus monetized sales, purchases and employment levels related to these transactions remain centered as the foci of economic development and as the core constituents of "the economy," and the *growth* of these levels remains the analytical focus.<sup>32</sup>

Accompanying and emergent from the emphasis on necessary growth is a focus on the dynamics of regional competition. In the context of a global economy that demands growth as a core criteria for survival, regions are pitted against each other in a struggle over growth-inducing resources and activities (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney 2006, 10).<sup>33</sup> The very purpose of regional economic analysis and planning in conventional RED is, in fact, "to enhance a region to position itself to build and maintain competitive advantage" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 4). Competition becomes a singular necessity and its dynamics drive policy decisions and interventions. "The evolution of the local economy" write Maliza and Fester, "can be grasped by

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32 Another dimension of this analysis, which can be highlighted via a critical look at the Plum Creek development plan process, is that the *ethical and social nature of the employment created or lost* cannot be modeled, and thus "employment in general" is elevated in value terms above the specific (and very different) forms of actual employment (in terms of structures, organizations, relations, ethics, culture, context, etc.) that exist "on the ground." The abstraction of the analytical tool itself enables a kind of ethical invisibility regarding these kinds of employment questions. "What kinds of jobs and for whom?" is not easily asked.

33 This may be more true of regional than of national economies, according to Krugman (cited in Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney 2006, 10).

understanding its relative attractiveness compared with other local economies" (1999, 19). This is the ontological dynamic of economic development: every region for themselves in an endless and inevitable contest for position. Even when dynamics such as "cooperation" or "collaboration" are invoked, they are placed in the service of a larger competitive goal: collaboration becomes "collaborative advantage" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 16).

In this competition paradigm, key elements of regional livelihood construction--and which exceed any form of calculable market relation--are subordinated to the instrumental process of competition. Thus, "high levels of internal networking and related trustful relationships" within a region (i.e., community and solidarity) are seen to "serve as central components of their competitiveness" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 24). It does appear, at times, that some authors of conventional RED raise questions about the centrality of competition in regional development processes. Stimson, Stough and Roberts ask, for example: "is competitiveness the only factor which drives economic development in regions?" and, pointing out the potential for strict competition to undermine social and environmental values in a region, they suggest that "there is a need...to rethink the relationship between competitiveness and sustainable development" (2006, 33). Yet such rethinking amounts to a *strategic shift in the competitive and accumulative process* rather than a deeper ontological rethinking of economic development theory and practice: instead of companies and regions in direct (old-school) competition, "competitiveness in the global economy is beginning to take on a new meaning as firms, regions and nations, realize the value added by competition through



collaboration, strategic alliances, partnership and resource sharing" (Stimson, Stough, and Roberts 2006, 33).

In the end, the very terrain of the possible for conventional RED is determined within a framework of necessary competition. As Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller write, "comparative advantage is a key concept, and a focus of community economic development hinges on identifying and acting on a community's comparative advantage.

*The visions of a community must be realistically in line with the community's comparative advantage*" (Shaffer, Deller, and Marcouiller 2004, 35-36, italics mine).

Such a perspective is perhaps most pronounced in Stimson, Stough and Roberts' notion of the "economic possibility index" (2006, 226). Far from being a tool to open up new options and imaginative practices for regional development, this analytical tool constructs a narrow world of the possible by measuring "the most competitive elements of the economy viewed from the strength of its core competencies, strategic architecture and a future industry perspective" (2006, 226). It is thus an index only of possible outcomes of interactions within an assumed competitive market and in which the play of value(s) is reduced to exchange value alone. In such an index, the possibility of developing viable "noncompetitive alternatives" (Hadjimichalis and Hudson 2007, 20) is eclipsed.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Another important dimension of economic life that is hidden by the language of "winning" and "losing" is that of equity and distribution. As Hudson points out, "even in those successful regions – not least the 'superstar' regions – that are deemed to have 'succeeded', there are issues of intra-regional inequality, poverty, and poor living and environmental conditions as a consequence of the inequitable distributions of the 'goods' and 'bads' that are integral to the practices of the capitalist economy" (2007a, 1156).

## Conclusion

Plum Creek's victory in the struggle over the future of development in Maine's north woods was not simply a matter of filling a void of economic development proposals with the right content at the right time. The absence of alternative discourses of possibility--and, as a result, the absence of alternative proposals--has emerged, in significant part, from a particular economic ontology perpetuated by economists, regional developers and mainstream media. As I have sought to show in this Chapter, the ontological stories of conventional RED work to separate (certain) economic processes from ecological and social relationships; to banish issues of ethical interrelationship from the (supposedly) objective domain of economy; to generate a narrowing of economic possibility through the discursive invisibilization of non-market, non-monetized livelihoods activity; and to naturalize dynamics of growth and competition as inherent and necessary processes in economic life and regional economic development. The cumulative effect of these operations is to constitute the economy as a space of constraint and necessity, a space in which possibility is restricted to a narrow set of options and in which, therefore, development projects such as Plum Creek's resort come to appear as nearly inevitable.

It is imperative, then, that any project of economic construction seeking to develop alternative possibilities and open up space for collective imagination and creation challenge the restrictive ontology of conventional RED by presenting and enacting other stories about what an economy is, what it is made of and how it works. This is not to advocate for a project of proposing alternate *truths*, but rather for an

experimental process of exploring the ways in which other ontologies might help to enable and invigorate new forms of economic politics and institutional construction. In the following chapter, I will turn to an in-depth exploration of how we might approach this process of ontological re-framing at a metatheoretical level. How, specifically, should we think about the "performativity" of economic representations? What power can we ascribe to such accounts of economic reality? What are the limits of performative reframing? How, when engaging in a strategic process of reframing economy and regional economic development at the ontological level, should we think about the possibilities and challenges presented in this work? With what criteria might we choose experimental ontologies capable of contributing to a shift in the terrain of ethical negotiation and imaginative construction?

## CHAPTER 2

### ECONOMY AS A PERFORMATIVE PROJECT: METATHEORETICAL APPROACHES

#### Introduction

The process of imagining and experimenting with new economic ontologies requires first that we develop a different relationship to the concept of "the economic" and, more generally, to the very process of theorization and experimentation.

Conventional RED, as we have seen, is constructed within the context of a robustly realist epistemology--a strong belief (generally implicit) that "the economy" names a real object, a real ontological space or structure whose properties can be known, measured and engaged. This approach naturalizes a socially-produced set of relationships--and thus distances these relationships from the field of political contestability--by positing the possibility (and then claiming the actuality) of an accurate correspondence between economic *knowledge* and a real object "out there" that is the *economy*. From such a perspective, the very question of ontology is nearly impossible to engage: the economy is an ontological given and the issues that arise for research and practice are *ontic*, posed at the level of detailing and describing that which has already been assumed into being. To interrogate conventional RED at its core, and to pose other pathways for exploration, is therefore to open the very question of *being* itself. How should we engage in ontological theorization? When we speak of "the economy," what should we think that we are saying? What might a non-realist approach to economic theory look like and how can we

mobilize such an approach in the service of opening communal imagination and inspiring collective action to build other economies?

In this chapter, I will outline a general theoretical approach to engaging with questions of economic ontology and alternative economic representation in the service of participatory regional development. Taking up in more detail some of the theoretical approaches suggested in Chapter 1, I will contend that the term "economy" does not refer to a real *thing* in the world that exists apart from our discursive construction of it.

"Economy," rather, should be understood as a particularly powerful discursive tool that mobilizes forces and articulates disparate elements (human and nonhuman) into particular webs of meaning and action, all of which are socially and historically contingent (Callon 2007; Gibson-Graham 2006a; Mitchell 1998; 2008). Such a conception should make clear that there are no "economic laws" apart from those that are made by specific, historical processes of institutionalization, habit- and desire-formation and cultural expectation. There is nothing *necessary* about economic dynamics: we *make* economy, therefore we can make it differently.

Yet this does not imply that everything is possible. Human agents live, relate and make worlds in the context of myriad others whose world-making activity "pushes back" at our attempts to craft imagined futures. The limits of possibility cannot, however, be known beforehand, and the work of challenging and developing alternatives to what Unger (2004) calls "necessitarian social theory" can open the way to processes of exploration and experimentation at (and perhaps, therefore, beyond) the margins of the possible.

Such work may be enabled, I will argue, by an understanding of the performativity of theory--an awareness of the ways in which the stories we tell about the world participate in its very construction. To weave a new discourse of economic ontology is thus to engage in a process of articulating new ways of feeling, thinking and enacting that are potentially *generative of* the the very economy that is proposed to exist. As Judith Butler writes, "recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject" (1993, 226). This implies that our ontologies are political acts and political choices, and that a process of developing new forms of livelihood and interrelationship must also be a process of proposing--thoughtfully, strategically, and provisionally--economic ontologies to support such relations. What kinds of experimental economic ontologies, we can ask, might enable us to remember our individual and collective power, help us to cultivate our creativity, allow us to see new possibilities for connection and creation, and facilitate our awareness of and responsibility toward the ethical interrelationships (human and more-than-human) of which we are a part?

### **The Economy As a Project**

The domain of being known as "the economy," as I discussed briefly in Chapter 1, is not an ahistorical, universal human reality. As an artifact of social imagination, the economy has been made, produced, constructed over time and through complex processes of theorization, measurement, institutionalization, and struggle. As Castree writes, "the economy did not preexist the term used to name it" (2004, 217), and its naming was no simple matter of linguistic articulation. Mitchell, in his analysis of the

construction of the autonomous economic domain, contends that the economy should be seen not as a system or a sphere of social existence, but rather as a *project*, " or a series of competing projects, of rival attempts to establish metrological regimes, based upon new technologies of organization, measurement, calculation, and representation" (2008, 1120). Calışkan and Callon similarly recognize the labor that has been (and continues to be) required to produce the economy as an object: "the economy," they write, "is an achievement rather than a starting point or a pre-existing reality that can simply be revealed and acted upon" (2009, 370).

The precise history of the construction of a notion of "the economy" is debated, with scholars such as Foucault, Schabas, Polanyi and Mitchell placing emphasis on different periods, processes and historical figures. It is clear for all of these authors, however, that there existed no such thing as an "economy" prior to the late 18th or early 19th century. This is not to say that relationships and phenomena that were later subsumed as "parts" of a distinct economic domain did not exist; indeed, a robust scholarly literature on trade, prices, markets, currencies, profits, and other such "economic" elements had been substantially developed in Europe, North Africa, India and China since at least the 14th century (Schumpeter 1954; Oweiss 1988) and was addressed even earlier by writers such as Aristotle and Chanakaya (Jah 1998). The term "economy" (often in the form "*oeconomy*"), however, was used primarily to refer either to an ethic or practice of using resources efficiently and conservatively (as in Armstrong's *Oeconomy of Love*, 1736) or to the patterns of resource circulation among diverse species (as in Linnaeus' *Oeconomie Animale*, 1749)<sup>35</sup>. Foucault argues that "the concepts of money,

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35 See Schabas 2005. The Linnaean "oeconomy of nature," according to Schabas, "encompassed human

price, value, circulation, and market" in the 17th and 18th centuries were not understood as elements of an *economy*, but were "part of a rigorous and general epistemological arrangement" built around the analysis of *wealth* (2002, 169).

Foucault (2002) particularly emphasizes the role of Adam Smith and his *Wealth of Nations* (1776) in the emergence of a notion of economy as a distinct domain, an "organic structure which grows in accordance to its own necessity and develops in accordance with autochthonous laws" (Foucault 2002, 245). According to this analysis the abstraction of value--in the form of *labor time* via the labor theory of value--from both the actual objects exchanged and the needs motivating such exchange made it possible to conceive of--and, indeed, to act to further *create*--a specific *thing*, and ontologically distinct sphere, called "the economy." This is not to say (and Foucault does not) that a coherent notion of economy emerges in Smith's work fully formed.<sup>36</sup> His ideas, rather, can be thought of as contributing significantly to the ideological conditions of possibility for the construction by his successors of a uniquely "economic" ontology.

According to Schabas, it is David Ricardo (1772-1823) who first fully articulated "a self-contained and self-regulating system of the production and distribution of commodities that can be more or less efficient and that can grow or decline" (2005, 5).

Ricardo, says Schabas, systematized many of the economic dynamics suggested in Smith

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production, the web that joins animals and plants, the earth's surface (including fossils), and what we would now call the hydrologic cycle" (2005, 5).

36 Schabas notes that even Smith rarely referred to an "economy" as a distinct sphere of life: "Ironically, Smith used the term [oeconomy] more in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* than in *The Wealth of Nations*. There are...references to the oeconomy of a person, meaning his frugality, but more often the word appears as the oeconomy of nature" (2005, 4). These usages are still much more tied to their prior designations, such as those found in the work of Linnaeus and Quesnay. It is not "economy," then, that Smith originates, but a new notion of value which enables future thinkers to "invent" economy (as we know it).



and introduced at least one profound and critical innovation that was crucial for a conception of an autonomous economy: an understanding of capital not as "equivalent to personal wealth, but, rather, as an advance to further production" (Schabas 2005, 119). Capital, in Ricardo, was disconnected once and for all from growth limitations previously thought to be imposed by land or labor. For the first time, it was possible to conceive of an economy as a fully distinct process, developing according to the internal imperatives of capital accumulation and, while still reaping value from land and labor, containing no inherent limits to growth. We see here the emergence of something much closer to "the economy" in its contemporary use: an independent force in which "capital accumulates as a result of inexorable laws of economic growth and development" (Schabas 2005, 119).

Karl Polanyi's (1944) account of the emergence of an autonomous market economy offers a useful perspective to both challenge and supplement Foucault and Shabas' concept-centered analyses. For Polanyi, economic history cannot be explained simply in terms of the discourses of key economic thinkers but must instead be rooted in an examination of the material and institutional processes through which a seemingly independent and self-governing "market economy" was built.<sup>37</sup> The conceptual enclosures of Smith, Ricardo and others that characterize the discursive development of the economy were, in fact, accompanied and enabled by (and, in turn, themselves *enabled*) the material enclosures of land and the transformation of the organization of human labor. As Polanyi shows through detailed historical analysis, the process of "primitive accumulation," of forcibly displacing landed peasants from their means of subsistence

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<sup>37</sup> It is important to note here that Polanyi was not specifically examining the emergence of an ontology of "the economy" *per se*, but was rather tracing the emergence of an autonomous "market economy." His work is also ambiguous with regard to the question of whether this market economy is *actually* autonomous or is, in fact, only a never-fully-succeeding attempt at such autonomy (Block 2000; 2003).

and privatizing common resources, was an essential material process for the creation of a seemingly-autonomous economic domain. "Human labor had to be *made* a commodity" (Polanyi 1944, 102, italics mine); tens of thousands of people had to be forced into a position in which they had "nothing to sell except their own skins" (Marx 1977, 873). It was the process of enclosure, sanctioned and enacted by government rule, that made possible the competitive English labor market, born in 1834 (Polanyi 1944, 83), that paved the way for the emergence of the contemporary "economic common sense" that "people need jobs." And it was this overall process of institutional construction that worked to generate and sustain the appearance of "the economy" (synonymous with "the market") as an independent and law-like domain.<sup>38</sup>

Mitchell (1998; 2008), as we have seen in Chapter 1, throws somewhat of a conceptual wrench into the gears of the narrative suggested here. In avowed contrast to the above authors (Foucault and Polanyi, at least), he contends that the contemporary concept of economy, "referring to the structure or totality of relations of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services within a given country or region" (Mitchell 1998, 87), dates only from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (1930s), but with conceptual roots traceable to the marginalist revolution of the 1870s.<sup>39</sup> Emulating physics, with its

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38 It is no coincidence that the era of Parliamentary enclosures in England (1760-1834) was bookended almost precisely by the publication of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) and Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848). These early economists, as Michael Perelman shows, were not simply thoughtful observers of an emerging reality; they were active participants in its creation (2000). Adam Smith, for one, was a "chief spokesman for a social movement of trading economy activists to exclude the state [and, I would argue, much of society and all of nature] from an active role in economic affairs" (Krohn 2002, 120). Despite a conceptual advocacy of *laissez-faire* policy, Smith and other economists (along with politicians and new classes of emerging elites), actively promoted policies and interventions in support of "the struggle against the self-provisioning of rural people" (Perelman 2000, 11). Economy (inextricably linked with processes that would later be called "capitalism") *was constructed in the early and mid 19th century through acts of conceptual and material violence.*

39 While Mitchell may overemphasize the claim that no concept of an autonomous, ontologically-distinct

unifying notion of "energy," marginalist economics sought to represent individual utility as a "unique, protean, unknowable force, giving the elements of the economic field their animation" (Mitchell 1998, 86) and thus to represent economic phenomena via abstract mathematical models such that there emerged a "predisposition to substitute mathematical description and quantitative measurement for an analysis of the actual nature of the phenomena being described, and to accept such description as a form of proof" (Mitchell 1998, 86). These models, in a sense, were confused for reality, performing into being a concept of economy as systematic, ordered, and fully measurable: machinelike.

Economists Ragnar Frisch and Jan Tinbergen are attributed by Mitchell as among the first to develop dynamic mathematized models of economic processes that shifted emphasis from a static machine concept to that of a "dynamic whole" with an inside and an outside. In this way, "the reworking of the mechanical imagery in the 1930s to imagine the possibility of an external force creating an impulse that reverberates through and sets up oscillations within a completely closed system marks the birth of the idea of the economy" (Mitchell 1998, 87). Building on but exceeding the early marginalist propensity for imagining the economy through mechanical metaphor, a newer econometrics helped to moved economics--and therefore the notion of economy itself--from the study of business cycles and commodity price fluctuations to the "attempt to

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economy existed prior to the 1930s (the arguments of Foucault, Schabas and Polanyi are not to be ignored), what emerges from the work of all of these scholars is a picture of the gradual emergence and consolidation of "the economy" over time and in a number of stages. The discursive construction of uniquely "economic" dynamics pertaining to an "economy" appears to have occurred in the mid-19th century, while its mathematical elaboration and more complete closure as a whole, fully-enclosed, autonomous, and growth-requiring system appears to have occurred later, in the mid-20th. This much is clear: the economy did not pre-exist its articulation, and that articulation has occurred through the exertion of much material and conceptual effort over a relatively recent span of time.

create a mathematical representation of the entire economic process as a self-contained and dynamic mechanism" (Mitchell 1998, 85).<sup>40</sup> This process of conceptual construction was advanced in a complimentary way by Keynes' *General Theory*, which represented--for the first time, Mitchell argues--a true notion of "the economic system as a whole" (Mitchell 1998, 85, quoting Keynes) , and was given a geographical scale (initially the national economy, as we have seen in Chapter 1) by Kuznets' techniques of national accounting (Mitchell 1998, 89).

Like Polanyi, Mitchell does not restrict his analysis of economic construction to the purely conceptual domain. The process of articulating disparate theories and institutions together to form a seemingly-coherent notion (and experience) of "the economy as a whole" *involves*, but does not *end* with, academic economists. A host of other (very material) processes enabled the conditions in which such a conception could emerge and appear as sensible. As Mitchell describes:

In the twentieth century, new ways of administering the welfare of populations, of developing the resources of colonies, organizing the circulation of money, compiling and using statistics, managing large businesses and workforces, branding and marketing products, and desiring and purchasing commodities brought into being a world that for the first time could be measured and calculated as though it were a free-standing object, the economy (Mitchell 2008, 1116).

We encounter here a profound and important tension in the analysis of "social construction." On one hand, "the economy" is clearly an idea, a story about reality that is told by theorists and organizers of social life to help make sense of the world and to

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<sup>40</sup> Mitchell identifies, also, the sense in which this new version of "economy" was tied to growth: "the new object could be imagined to grow-- without altering its physical limits... Once economic discourse took as its object the fixed space of the nation-state... it became possible and necessary to imagine economic growth in new terms, not as material and spatial extension but as the internal intensification of the totality of relations defining economy as an object" (Mitchell 1998, 89).

enable or justify certain ways of acting and engaging. From Smith to Keynes, this idea has a history that can be traced and rendered contestable. Yet at the same time, this story has a thoroughly material basis and, as such, it draws from and helps to consolidate the very reality that it names. The economy is made not only by Adam Smith and Simon Kuznets, but by the swords of landlords' minions on horseback, spilling blood to destroy common property. Does the materiality of the construction of economy mean, then, that "the economy" is *real*, is a *fact*? Is claiming that "the economy is constructed" akin simply to stating the obvious point that "a building is built?"

Castree attempts to describe the process of economic construction by suggesting that "the category [economy] organizes thought and practice so that, over time and iteratively, it helps to fashion the very 'economic realities' it apparently represents" (2004, 218). This may be the case, but we are still left with an uncertainty regarding the "reality" of this discourse. When we say that the economy is constructed over time, do we mean that it is simply a social story, an explanatory narrative, that is used to justify some forms of social organization and to hide others? Or do we mean that the story of economy has worked, over time, to bring into *actual being* that which it claims to name? Or do we somehow mean both things at once? The stakes involved in this question are high, for our answers have great bearing on how we proceed in the work of imagining and constructing alternative economic futures. Is it enough to tell different economic stories, to propose new economic ontologies? Or, on the contrary, do such stories matter very little in a world that has been *made into* the very economy that was once only theorized in mathematical models?

## The Performativity of Concepts and the Performance of Economy

Is the world made of stories or stones? If I say *stones*, you can remind me that "stone" is a discourse, always-already bound up in a complex web of signification and thus inseparable from the stories that work to constitute it. If I say *stories*, you will drop a stone on my foot and then ask me (as I yelp in pain), "did that feel like it was just a story?" It is, in a sense, a silly debate; yet it gets at something: a complex interaction in which two sets of processes appear to be inseparable from each other and yet can be named as somehow distinct--language and materiality, word and thing.

I do not wish to claim that the material configurations of the world arise from ideas and concepts. Neither do I wish to claim the contrary. Nor, in fact, do I wish to claim that the two are "dialectically" related in some structured way. Rather, I want to suggest that both ideas and materiality shape and constitute the world, together, differently, and in ways that cannot be theorized or predicted "beforehand." In any particular instance of human history--the construction of the economy being a case in point--the relationship between words and things is specific, contextual, contingent and indeterminate.

In the case of the economy, we clearly see that both stories and stones are co-implicated. It is thus possible for Polanyi (who was no postmodernist) to make the historical claim that "the significance of the economic outlook lay precisely in its capacity for giving birth to a unity of motivations and valuations that would bring about in practice what it precognized as an ideal, namely the identity of market and society" (1977, 10), while at the same time Calışkan and Callon can assert that "the establishment

of an economy involves institutional arrangements and material assemblages, without which nothing economic could exist or be sustained" (2009, 371). When I, following scholars such as Gibson-Graham (2006b; 2008a), focus on the transformative potential of economic discourses, I am not claiming that economies are produced by (conceptual) discourses alone, or even primarily. I am proposing, rather, that such discourses can--and in some cases very much do--play significant roles in the production of worlds. A theorization of the performativity of discourse, combined with elements of actor network theory (ANT) can be helpful in elaborating such an approach.

A realist approach to epistemology asserts the existence of a world "out there," independent of any accounts made of that world (Law 2007a). In this way, stories or theories *describe* the world--they can be more or less accurate representations of an objective reality. A performative approach to discourse breaks with such a conception. While able to remain agnostic (or to hold, even, contradictory opinions) about ontology (the question of the "reality" of an "external world"), theorists who embrace performativity recognize that meaning-making processes organize our experiences of the world and, in so doing, influence our ways of feeling, thinking and acting. It is impossible to demarcate the lines that separate "the world" from these processes through which we encounter it and with which we then act to intervene in it. Our concepts of the world emerge from the world, but they also contribute to *making* it. The production of knowledge, the creation of representations of our world(s)--economies being no exception--is an exercise of performative power in which we participate in the process of mobilizing actors and constructing real relationships. Referring specifically to the stories

told by academic researchers, Law and Urry write that "social inquiry and its methods are productive: they (help to) make social realities and social worlds. They do not simply describe the world as it is, but also enact it" (2004, 391). Put differently, "research methods...are performative...they have effects, they make differences, they enact realities; and they can help to bring into being what they also discover" (Law and Urry 2004, 392).

The concept of the "performativity" of discourse was first articulated by the British philosopher J. L. Austin (1975) in identifying a particular class of utterances which, unlike descriptive statements, work not simply to depict a situation but to bring it into being. Austin's examples included the act of saying "I do" in a marriage ceremony and the act of naming a ship, "I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth" (Austin 1975, 5). Judith Butler, in her groundbreaking work on the "performativity of gender" (1999; 1993) took Austin's concept to another level in suggesting that gender itself is not a description of an objective "reality," but is continually constituted through its performance via gendered discourse and material practice. Since Butler's intervention, a wide array of scholars in the humanities and social sciences have adopted and applied theorizations of performativity--including in the domain of the economy (Aitken 2006; Aspers 2007; Caliskan and Callon 2009; Callon 1998; MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu 2007). As we have seen, of course, claims about the power of words and concepts to constitute reality can differ widely. Thus, while language, ideas, concepts, and theoretical frameworks can be said to be "performative," there are significantly varying degrees to which their performative effects might be actualized. Some things are more performative than others, and different notions of performativity have emerged from the literature.



MacKenzie's (2007) work on the performativity of economics usefully distinguishes a number of types of the performative. "To claim that economics is performative," he writes, "is to argue that it does things, rather than simply describing (with greater or lesser degrees of accuracy) an external reality that is not affected by economics" (2007, 54). What does it do and how does it do this? MacKenzie identifies four forms that theories of performativity embody. "Generic performativity" refers quite simply to the actual use, in the world, of particular theories by practitioners. Concepts (theories about how markets work, how prices should be set, or the effects of changing the minimum wage, for example) perform here only in the sense that they are used, like tools, to do things or to make a certain kind of sense out of experience. If such theories actually succeed in *doing* something, in making some kind of difference, then they are said by MacKenzie to be forms of "effective performativity." Here (again quite simply), "the practical use of an aspect of economics has an effect on economic processes " (2007, 55). A third form, that of "Barnesian performativity" (named after the social theorist Barry Barnes who utilizes a similar concept) occurs when "an effect of the use in practice of an aspect of economics is to make economic processes more like their depiction by economics" (MacKenzie 2007, 56). A particular theory of the market, for example, would generate in such performativity a set of policy and/or behavior choices that *generate* the very dynamic posited by the theory.<sup>41</sup> Finally, MacKenzie identifies the precise converse of Barnesian performativity as the fourth form: "counterperformativity," the process by which a particular account of the world may contribute to the construction of realities

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41 This is precisely Castree's notion of performativity, cited earlier: The category [economy] organizes thought and practice so that, over time and iteratively, it helps to fashion the very 'economic realities' it apparently represents" (2004, 218).

*contrary* to their own depiction (2007, 56). In this form, we might say that--as in a situation where a particular theory of market behavior leads to unpredicted crises--counterperformativity is when the world bites back (or when the stone hits the foot).

The first two forms of performativity identified by MacKenzie--generic and effective--do not particularly concern me. That a theory is used says very little; that it does something (anything) says little more. The second two forms, however--Barnesian and counter- performativity--offer starting points for further exploration of what it means to take the world-making power of discourse seriously in the domain of economy. Barnesian performativity suggests, in line with aspects of with the work of Callon, Mitchell and others, that discourses about the economy significantly participate in making economic reality. As Mitchell writes, "the projects that form the economy involve economics; economics is not outside, representing the economy from some other place. It is caught up in these projects. The success of economics, like all science, is measured in the extent to which it helps make of the wider world places where its facts can survive" (2008, 1119).

Gudeman (2008) offers a striking example of this process of performing a particular economic world into being. The neoclassical model of the rational optimizing agent, he argues:

...fortifies and legitimates the world of the market by turning the practices of trade into a theory of the rational actor, and then re-presenting this market reification as his original subjectivity and mode of being. Ultimately, this representation of the actor can be used to justify the expansion of the market in order to increase 'welfare.' Re-presented in the discourse of economics and market participants, the rational calculator--the measurer of means and ends--increasingly becomes the subjectivity by which we live (2008, 61).

We have here a claim that particular discourses of economic ontology make such an ontology more real, thus verifying their own claims. Yet MacKenzie's important notion of "counterperformativity" opens up a certain kind of doubt regarding this account of the construction of an economic terrain. If, at times, certain accounts of the world participate in rendering the world *inhospitable* to their claims, then how strong can a general claim to the "performativity of economic discourse" actually be? This uncertainty suggests--and I will return to this further below--that there are other actors involved in the process of world-making, and that "performing other economies" might require more than the construction of alternative ontological accounts.

Useful as they are, MacKenzie's distinctions are limited in an important way. All four types of performativity that he identifies involve a kind of "gap" between the discourse (in his case produced the discipline of economics) and the *thing*. The question is always about the various different ways and degrees in/to which the discourse or process of knowledge production *shapes* the thing itself--does economics make the economy more or less like its account? There is, in these conceptions, little recognition of the role that such economic discourse plays in forming the *conditions of possibility* for the thing itself (and vice versa); in other words, MacKenzie does not appear to acknowledge the sense in which economics participates in bringing the very ontological claim of "economy" *into being*. Put differently, economy for MacKenzie *remains an ontological given rather than a question*. It is here that I believe Judith Butler's notion of performativity offers a more robust formulation on which to build.

Butler pushes Austin's performative utterance to the level of ontology itself. While never denying (despite accusations to the contrary) materiality, Butler refuses to constitute a divide between word and world, story and stone. All being in which we participate is always already, for Butler, constituted in a web of signification. If there is no "outside to discourse," it is not because our stories fabricate a world from nothing, but because there is also no outside to the materiality of meaning; there is no sense in which any concept or ontological account can be separated from the web of bodies and relationships that it refers to, and no sense in which these bodies can be de-linked from discourse.<sup>42</sup> "The constative claim," writes Butler, collapsing Austin's distinction between constative (descriptive) and performative utterances, "is always to some degree performative" (1993, 11). Performativity is "a property common to all utterance" (Sedgwick 1993, 2). Butler's explanation of a performative approach to "sex" is clear and helpful here:

To "concede" the undeniability of "sex" or its "materiality" is always to concede some version of "sex," some formation of "materiality." Is the discourse in and through which that concession occurs—and, yes, that concession invariably does occur—not itself formative of the very phenomenon that it concedes? To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body (Butler 1993, 10).

This sense of performativity--which we might add to Mackenzie's scheme as a fifth form, that of *ontological performativity*--allows us to speak about the construction of an ontological domain of "the economy" without either reducing this account to "merely a

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<sup>42</sup> Gibson-Graham make a similar point, perhaps more clearly, in their observation that "This is not to say that things, beings, processes, and places have no influence on how we think about them, but that they do not generally speak clearly and conceptually for themselves. Theory, then, has an independent and even an adventurous role to play" (Gibson-Graham 2006a, xx).

story" (as if there were no materiality to such an economy) or conceding a non-discursive reality to such an economy that somehow lies beyond the reach of any concept or articulatory process. We can say, then, paraphrasing Butler that "there is no reference to a real economy which is not at the same time a further formation of that economy."

Mitchell's claim that the economy as an object of analysis and intervention "is itself constituted as a discursive process, a phenomenon of values, representations, communications, meanings, goals and uses, none of which can be separated from or said to pre-exist their representation in economic discourse" (Mitchell 1998, 91), can be seen in this light not as a claim that the economy is nothing but a language game, but that its assemblage must always be understood and engaged in the context of the discourses in which it is inextricably bound.

Despite this clarification, crucial questions of power remain. Does the ontological performativity of the economy imply that "the economy" can be transformed by a change in the discourses we generate and mobilize about it? Gibson-Graham, in advocating that capitalism "is strengthened, its dominance performed, as an effect of its representations " (2008a, 3) has sometimes been accused of a certain kind of narrative voluntarism--as if to suggest that telling a different story about capitalism and economics is sufficient to generate a liberated, non-capitalist world (e.g., Scott 2004). Such accusations do not, however, pay adequate attention to the robust theorizations of the co-implications of materiality, discourse and power that have been offered by Butler (1993; 1996), Laclau and Mouffe (2001; 1998) and others (including Gibson-Graham, who draw on these authors). Performativity, for Butler, is inseparable from questions of power and an

analysis of the differential possibilities for the discursive transformation of a particular identity or process. It is, in fact, "a specific modality of power *as* discourse" (Butler 1993, 187, italics mine).<sup>43</sup> Butler is explicit not only that performativity is about power, but also that this power does not simply lie in the performative utterance itself but rather in the entire field of power relations--the "chains of iteration"--of which a given performative is a part and which provide its very intelligibility. "For discourse to materialise a set of effects, 'discourse' itself must be understood as complex and convergent chains in which 'effects' are vectors of power" (Butler 1993, 187).

Performativity cannot be read, for Butler, as an act of "willful and arbitrary choice," as if the performing into being of a world was decided upon and then enacted by a singular, agential, ontological declaration. It should be obvious, of course, that to propose an economic ontology is *not* to bring that ontology into being. The performativity of discourse requires that the performative utterance mobilize and enact a whole set of relations that are at once historical accretions of past repetitions (institutionalizations) and immediate linkages to other narratives and the extra-linguistic contexts of which the utterance is a part. Bordieu saw this issue clearly in relation to Austin's notion:

Austin's account of performative utterances cannot be restricted to the sphere of linguistics. The magical efficacy of these acts of institution is inseparable from the existence of an institution defining the conditions (regarding the agent. the time or place. etc.) which have to be fulfilled for the magic of words to operate. As is indicated in the examples analyzed by Austin, these 'conditions of felicity' are social conditions, and the person who wishes to proceed felicitously with the christening of a ship or

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43 Said differently, "if the power of discourses to produce what it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts *as* discourse" (Butler 1993, 225).

of a person must be entitled to do so, in the same way that, to be able to give an order, one must have a recognized authority over the recipient of that order (Bourdieu 1991, 73).

Butler, of course, does not restrict her understanding of performativity to Austin's (or Bordieu's) domains and so enables a much broader and intensive understanding of the constitutive role of context in empowering the performative. "The reading of 'performativity' as willful and arbitrary choice," she contends, "misses the point that the historicity of discourse and, in particular, the historicity of norms (the 'chains' of iteration invoked and dissimulated in the imperative utterance) constitute the power of discourse to enact what it names" (1993, 187).

Here, Butler's notion of "citationality" is crucial. Discourse is performative, she suggests, only to the extent that it is able to *cite* extensive networks of other relationships and previous (historical) performative discourses. By way of example, she notes that "the judge who authorizes and installs the situation he names invariably *cites* the law that he applies, and it is the power of this citation that gives the performative its binding or conferring power" (1993, 225). The performative power of the economic ontologies of conventional RED does not lie, in this account, in any particular instance of its expression (in, for example, our now all-too-familiar Stimson, Stough and Roberts); it lies, instead, in the processes through which these texts invoke a complex web of other texts, other scholars, other instances of knowledge production and affirmation, the institutions named (and thus reiterated by citation) and connected in and through the narrative, and the relationships--courses taught, studies presented at conferences, ideas mobilized in planning sessions, claims presented to politicians, etc.--that the economic ontologies of

conventional RED are bound up in and help to constitute. "If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that 'success' is always and only provisional)," Butler asserts, "then it is not because an intention successfully governs the actions of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices" (1996, 206).

It is useful to note here the important resonances between Butler's notion of performativity and Laclau and Mouffe's concept of "articulation." The former can, in fact, help to further clarify and develop our understanding and use of the latter in the context of work for economic transformation. The term "articulation" has at least two meanings: in one sense, articulation refers to a process of speaking, of signifying and communicating through language; in another sense, it refers to the points of connection and transitional movement, as between bones, musical notes, or other elements. Developing the concept in the context of a theory of discourse that is at once linguistic and material, Laclau and Mouffe mobilize these two senses of articulation simultaneously (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Torfing 1999). Social reality, in their formulation, is materialized as such through "differential ensemble[s] of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated" (Torfing 1999, 85). They offer a wall-building process as an example: when a bricklayer says, "pass me a brick," and then adds this new brick to the wall, the linguistic act and the material act "are both part of a total operation which is the building of a wall" (Laclau and Mouffe 1998). This totality is called *discourse*. The process of linkage between the various elements of a discursive construction is their *articulation*. In this sense, both the speech-act and the material



connection of articulation are inseparable moments of the same constructive process.

“The practice of articulation,” write Laclau and Mouffe, “cannot consist of purely linguistic phenomena; but must instead pierce the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured” (2001, 109).

We find here a concept quite similar to performativity, in which the moment of utterance (“pass me a brick”) is only enacted and given power through its articulation with the entire context in which it is uttered--not the least of which includes the materiality of the brick and the building project itself. Thus, returning to economics, one cannot separate the process of presenting a powerful economic ontology from the entire social-material context in which that presentation is embedded (and which, as we see, it simultaneously works to constitute). The world is continually emergent, in this way, from interacting--and often conflicting--material-semiotic discourses and their articulatory combinations. Economies *are* made by economic concepts and by the performative power of economic ontologies, but only to the extent that these concepts function as successful nodes of articulation, citing, mobilizing, and organizing other actors and discourses into their common project of world-making. Drawing on precisely this notion of discourse and articulation, Daly contends that “the economy, like all other spheres, is the terrain of political struggle, and is governed not by a single logic but by a proliferation of discourses. In other words, it cannot exist prior to, or outside of, its articulation with a set of other social/political discourses in concrete historical conjunctures” (1991, 100).

Laclau and Mouffe's notion of articulation allows us to clarify, I think, the sense in which performativity acts effectively only in and through material and discursive (bound together, hence "material-semiotic") mobilizations of other actors and relationships. Butler's citationality could be read (though it would not be accurate to her intentions) as an inadvertent re-centering of the individual subject in a world of externally-imposed constraints--the power of the performative constrained by the limits of the references available to cite (as if they were simply 'out there' or not). Viewing performativity as a process of articulation--the process of linking together, or organizing material relationships in and through the use of concepts (and vice versa)--allows us to clarify the fundamentally creative and collaborative as well as antagonistic nature of the process. Performativity is not a property of the discourse uttered by a singular anti-capitalist scholar, but rather the name of a process--which may or may not occur--by which this scholar's discourse becomes an active node in the construction of new relationships and new forms of collective knowledge and action. This is why an alternative "performance" of economics must be a *participatory process* of collective development.

Butler and Laclau and Mouffe's concepts, while profoundly useful, are limited in at least one significant way. The subject of performance (or of articulation) often appears, for them (at least by default), to be a *human* subject.<sup>44</sup> This is a problem for at least two reasons. First, it risks affirming an ontology in which world-making is primarily the work of humanity and thus obscures the active roles of non-human subjects and their ethical

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<sup>44</sup> It is, perhaps, somewhat unfair to the anti-humanist Butler to assert so strongly that her subjects remain haunted by the human. A much weaker version of my claim--but one that still opens the way for the points that I wish to make--is that the lack of an explicitly developed conception of non-human agency and participation in the performance of discourse risks the default re-centering of the human. As with all processes of absence/presence, a "neutral" position remains complicit with the always-assumed presence (in this case, of the human as the name of the subject of performance).

implications. Secondly, it renders more difficult the work of accounting for all of the ways that, in the face of even the most powerful performances of discursive articulation by human actors, the world "pushes back." That is to say that we need to be able to talk about and engage with the limitations of human political articulations, the sense in which even great aggregates of historical citation and discursive mobilization--if restricted to the human realm--run up against limits and become quickly irrelevant. No amount of (human) performative work in the realm of mainstream economics, for example, can overcome the fact that the world talks back.<sup>45</sup> The planet's climate heats, even if we mobilize millions to pretend otherwise or generate performative discourses that bring complex regimes of fanciful technological remediation into being. Something of the notion of "counterperformativity" returns here: how do we account for all of the ways that even the most powerful performances fail to make the world into their own image? And what are the implications of this for the work of economic transformation?

It is here that work by Latour (2005), Law (2007b), Mol (1998), Haraway (1996) and others--often referred to under the name of "actor network theory" (ANT) or "material-semiotics" (Law 2007b)--can be extremely useful. For these authors, discourse is clearly performative in an ontological sense quite similar to Butler's formulation; the key difference is that the performers--in Latour's terms "actants" (2005, 54)--*are not just human*. Discourse is not only a process bound up in materially-grounded linguistic construction (though it is sometimes that as well), but rather exceeds the domain of human action and agency as a process of world-construction among human and

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<sup>45</sup> There is something here that gets at the anger some scientists express toward poststructuralist discourse theories: sometimes it doesn't matter what story we tell! How, then, do we account for this? How do we hold on to a sense of the performative construction of worlds while also acknowledging its limitations? As we will see, actor network theory may offer a way to do this.

nonhuman actors alike (Chernaik 1999, 87). Haraway advocates for an understanding of the performative or articulatory power of discourse as constituting "heterogeneous and continuous construction through historically located practice, where all the actors are not human" (Haraway 1996, 68). Latour, similarly, understands "reality" as a process of interrelation in which multiple actants--human and nonhuman--engage (collaborate, compete, co-opt) in the work of "composing a common world" (2004, 247).

Politics, in this way of thinking, is about relations of power, and all objects--all actants--in the world are engaged in power-enacting, thus *political*, material-semiotic relationships. "Latourian metaphysics," as Harman (2009) might call it, refuses to accept an ontological gap between the forms of power exercised by humans and those exerted by other beings and other forces: *all* beings (ontological discourses, measurements, rocks, humans, vegetables, political institutions, etc.) are actors engaged in struggles to create alliances and materialize reality. There is no "social" construction of reality for Latour--the "social" is *itself* constructed (2005, 91)--but there is *construction* as a process that names the assemblage of worlds by heterogeneous actants. "Latour," writes Harman, "is not a social constructionist holding that the world is malleable clay subjected to the whims of a mighty human society. After all, neutrons and governments both resist Joliot [a developer of nuclear fission for energy production], just as ferments and newspapers resist Pasteur. Humans both *shape* and are *shaped by* other actor, no more or less than they shape one another" (2009, 81). This implies is that the world is materialized, continually, by the ongoing construction of relationships between actants. Things that behave as if they were solid, "real," beyond the reach of human narrative, do so not

because they are made of something more durable than anything else but because they are constituted by larger and more powerful assemblages. "The word 'substance,'" proclaims Latour, "does not designate 'what remains beneath', impervious to history, but what gathers together a multiplicity of agents into a stable and coherent whole... Substance is a name that describes the stability of an assemblage" (1999, 151).

Performativity, then, can be said to name the processes through which concepts, names and narratives are able to draw together multiple actors into stable assemblages (or at least to appear to do so). This drawing together, this enlisting of beings, is an *articulation*. A successful performative story or concept is one that is able to contribute substantially to the articulation or enlistment of multiple (different kinds of) actants in such a way as to generate a certain degree of durability.<sup>46</sup> We cannot, therefore, know beforehand the extent to which a given narrative--or, more specifically, an economic ontology--is *actually* performative (or counterperformative).<sup>47</sup> It is only in the performing that this is determined, and even then only at any given moment--for, as we shall see, all performances are subject to collapse, transformation or "swerve." It must also be the case that not every articulation is made of the same "stuff" and therefore that the constitutive

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46 Another mark of success, which may often accompany durability, is the way in which many performances cover over their own fragility and contingency. Latour calls the ensuing stability (a hiding of the process of construction) a "black box" (Harman 2009, 37), Laclau and Mouffe refer to Lacan's notion of "suturing" (2001, 88), and Butler asks, "Does a subject appear as the author of its discursive effects to the extent that the citational practice by which he/she is conditioned and mobilized remains unmarked?" (1996, 205) and subsequently answers in the affirmative, stating that "a performative 'works' to the extent that it draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized" (1996, 206).

47 Neoclassical economics, for example, looked for quite some time to be profoundly and powerfully performative. Yet precisely because so many actants in the world are left out of its narrative--unmobilized, unenlisted--it has generated a counter reaction whose swell we are just beginning to see. I both suspect and hope that we are entering a period of time in which this form of academic discourse will become counterperformative; that is, will generate a response from all of those actants left out in the cold that will render its articulations weak, unstable and ultimately doomed to disappearance in the dust bin of historical bad ideas.

relations and processes that make worlds cannot be reduced to formulas. Some constructions may, in fact, be made primarily in and through the agency of human actors. Some constructions may hold together despite robust protest from nonhumans. Some may never enable human discourse to enlist them in a meaningful or (to humans) coherent way. Each process of world-making, each nodal point or condensation of relations that has achieved some kind of (at least apparent) stability must be examined for its own history and its own ongoing processes of materialization. The economy is no exception.

Let us return to our exploration of the construction of "the economy" and, more particularly, to the specific construction mobilized by conventional RED scholarship. The economic ontologies described and critiqued in Chapter 1 can certainly said to be performative in the sense that they reciprocally contribute to and emerge from a wider field of articulation in which multiple actors--including the authors of the texts that I have engaged--work continually to secure the solidity of the economy that is described. Stimson, Stough and Roberts' economic ontology gains its performative power from (for example) its citational linkages to nearly two hundred years of economic theory and the performative effects of this theory; from the prestige (itself enacted materially) of the authors' credentials; from its use in university courses (including one that I took) throughout the world, teaching "economic reality" to future economic development professionals and policymakers; from the policies and strategies that these students enact in their respective regions; from the ways in which quantitative analysis functions as a tool to enlist nonhuman (seemingly "objective," and thus very powerful) actants into narratives that confirm the very reality of what is being measured--processes that Latour

calls "metrologies" (2005, 227);<sup>48</sup> and from the thousands of news stories--smoothly and professionally produced--that repeat this ontology over and over again.<sup>49</sup> There is no sense in which conventional RED's ontology is "just a story"; nor is it an objective reality to be encountered. It is *made*, painstakingly and imperfectly, discursively and materially, at great cost and with vast expenditures of energy.<sup>50</sup>

Such a performance does not stand alone; indeed, we must be clear that every performance is linked to others. As Mol writes, "objects that are performed do not come alone: they carry modes and modulations of other objects with them" (1998, 81).<sup>51</sup> Citationality is not just historical, reaching back into past accretions of heterogeneous performance; it is also simultaneously *lateral*, linking at each moment to the constitutive processes of other performances. In the case of the production of the economy of conventional RED, the ontological performance of economy (as was suggested in Chapter 1) is inextricably bound up with--and at once constitutive of--performative

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48 As Mitchell describes, "metrologies create and stabilize objects; the economy is a very large instance of such an object, with rival attempts to define it and to design tools for its measurement and calculation... Rather than assuming there was always an economy, then, we need to explore the rival metrological projects that brought the economy into being" (2008, 1119).

49 In a similar, not more general vein, Latour writes: "There is no such thing as an economy, just as there is no such thing as a *Homo oeconomicus*, but there is indeed a progressive economization of relations. We do not find, at the bottom, an economic infrastructure that the economists, situated above, would study: the economizers (in the broad sense of the term, which has to include accounting systems and modeling scenarios, mathematicians, marketing specialists, and statisticians) performed the collective by stabilizing relations between humans and nonhumans" (2004, 135-136). For an excellent example of scholarship that traces the material processes of discursive construction in regional economic development, see Gibson (2001) and Gibson-Graham (2006b, chapter 2).

50 "The real," write Law and Urry, "is produced in thoroughly non-arbitrary ways, in dense and extended sets of relations. It is produced with considerable effort, and it is much easier to produce some realities than others" (2004, 396).

51 Mol elaborates further in pointing out that, "the various performances of reality...have all kinds of tensions between them, but to separate them out as if they were a plurality of options is to skip over the complex interconnections between them" (1998, 86).

ontologies of nature and society, of market and state, of public and private, of growth and competition. Articulated together, this web of performative processes may be said in Laclau and Mouffe's terms to constitute "hegemony," that is, a discursive formation in which difference appears as sameness in the service of covering over the essential instability of the social. This is precisely Gibson-Graham's critique of capitalocentrism: that even anti-capitalist discourses often remain locked into (and thus affirming of) an economic ontology in which chains of equivalence are constructed between diverse and disparate (potentially rebellious) actants in such a way that they appear as part of the same project, the same coherent all-encompassing "system" of Capital's accumulation and reproduction (Gibson-Graham 1996).

Does this account of material-semiotic construction paint us back into a situation in which we are faced with a singular, unified, materialized hegemony that we must then either concede to or overthrow? The work of navigating the perilous line between stories and stones risks throwing us up, once again, on the rocky shoals of necessity and constraint. But not so fast: our recognition of the materiality, plurality and complexity of performance need not regenerate a kind of pragmatic realism in which conscious, strategic discursive choices cease to have a crucial role to play, or (quite literally) cease to matter. In the various work on performativity, articulation and material-semiotic enactment that I have presented, there are a number of crucial openings that can be found, each offering a perspective on the possibilities for transformative intervention and--taken together--offering a kind of framework for thinking about the strategic pragmatics of discursive projects of economic innovation. I identify four key ways in which even the



most durable constructions might remain open or vulnerable to change: the impossibility of perfect performance, the unruliness of enlisted actants, the inevitable existence of an outside, and the co-existence of multiple worlds. I will explore each in turn.

First, the impossibility of perfect performance. Butler weaves her account of the performance of gender as a process of imitation, but not, to be clear, and imitation of a *real original*. The performativity of gender, for Butler, always suggests a kind of parody that reveals the very nonexistence of an "original" from which a copy can be made. A given performance is thus stabilized through "a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 1999, 140) which seek to continually repeat or reiterate the identity posited. Without an ongoing performance, the seeming stability of gender is revealed as little more than an ongoing, contingent stabilization, a process of *making-gender* or of *gendering*.<sup>52</sup> "The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of the 'ground'" (Butler 1999, 141). It is the need for the ongoing iteration of identity that offers the possibility for transformation of even the most hegemonic formations, since each repetition of a performance hold the potential for failure, for deviance, or for the enactment of something different.

John Holloway's work applies this kind of thinking to the domain of economy. "We make capitalism," he writes. "If capitalism exists today, it is not because it was created in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, but because it was created today, because we create it today. If we do not create it tomorrow, it will not exist tomorrow" (2005). If

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52 Exactly analogous to Caliskan and Callon's notion of "economizing" (Caliskan and Callon 2009; 2010).

conventional RED is read as a key contributor to a process of performing a particular kind of (highly problematic) economy into being, then we must also see that this is not a once-and-done act. Stimson, Stough and Roberts' work must be read over and over again, assigned anew each semester, cited in always-recent articles, reinterpreted continually by thousands of text-betraying students (like me). The ontological proposition that the economy exists as an autonomous non-social, non-ethical human domain animated by systemic laws and logics can only remain stable, viable--can only pass the proverbial straight-face test--if it is continually reproduced day after day, semester after semester, year after year. Even the most stable human-inspired constructions (buildings, for example) collapse if they are not maintained. Performances, likewise, depreciate without new infrastructural investment. Hence, the possibility--always present--for betrayal. Hence even the *inevitability* that conventional RED's economic ontology will one day be a historical artifact, a strange archaic narrative excavated from the dusty corners of some library basement. What are we seeking to perform in its place?

This view from Butler points us toward another opening, expressed most clearly in the work of Latour. Just as performances must be continually reiterated, so must actants in a given performance be continually enlisted. As we have seen, no performance can achieve stability without help from many beings, human and nonhuman. The nature of the actants and the effectivity and stability of their enlistment in a given construction is the mark, quite precisely, of that construction's durability. This is where things get exciting: we live in an unruly "pluriverse," as Latour (2004, 40) calls it, one in which actants are often unreliable, rebellious, and always have capacities that exceed those

which are realized in a given assemblage. Latour calls these actants "mediators," and describes that "their input is never a good predictor of their output; their specificity has to be taken into account every time. Mediators transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (2005, 39). Another way to say all of this is that the agency of actants never fully comes under the control of those people, institutions and discourses that seek to co-opt or subsume it. Rebellion, intransigency, non-cooperation, or simply enlistment by others for other purposes is always possible, and always threatens the stability of a given performance or articulation.

Gibson-Graham presents this kind of opening through Bennett's notion of the "spunk or swerve of bodies" (2006, 14, quoting Bennett 2001), the sense in which the materiality of bodies itself acts and thus can generate affective swerves from a given discursive pathway into new and open territory. Hegemonic economic narratives--like all narratives--will always fail to perfectly enlist all actants as compliant subjects who faithfully deliver the goods. The bodily swerves described by Gibson-Graham through her reading of the film *The Full Monty*, where laid-off miners find new possibility in the affective exploration of bodies, dance and public sensuality, are themselves emergent from much more dramatic and violent forms of non-compliance and actant rebellion. In the case of economic crises, people, institutions and other nonhuman entities fail to conform to economic theories and models and thus generate a kind of rupture in which the contingency, imperfection and fragility of the hegemonic formation is made apparent (Glynos and Howarth 2007). It is in such spaces--though by far not *only* in such spaces--that the possibility presents itself to reconfigure the dominant assemblage of beings, to

propose and to construct new combinations, co-opting and enlisting many from the shards of what has been ruptured.

A third opening also presents itself: that of the *outside*. There is always an outside, always someone or some relation who has been left out, and this exclusion is itself what constitutes the unity of that which it is excluded from. To make categories, lines must be drawn, bodies cut. What this indicates is the essential instability of any construction: these slices cause trouble. As Butler writes, 'materialization,' while far from artificial, is not fully stable...[it] requires and institutes a 'constitutive outside'--the unspeakable, the unviable, the nonnarrativizable that secures and, hence, fails to secure the very borders of materiality...[these] exclusions haunt signification as its abject borders or as that which is strictly foreclosed" (Butler 1993, 188). The rebels, the abject against whom the king defines his goodness and purity, lurk at the edges, in the forests, in the shadows, and eventually come back to bite the empire in the ass.<sup>53</sup>

Mitchell's work is a clear application of this sensibility to the domain of economy:

The invention of the economy required a great work of imagination on the part of economists and econometricians, to find methods of representing every relationship constituting a nation's economic life and giving each one a value. At the same time, the invention also required a process of exclusion. To fix a self-contained sphere like the economy requires not only methods of counting everything within it, but also, and perhaps more importantly, some methods of excluding what does not belong. No whole or totality can be represented without somehow fixing its exterior. To create the economy meant also to create the non-economic (1998, 91).

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<sup>53</sup> These are Derrida's "parerga" in *The Truth In Painting*, those elements which constitute "an outside which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute it as an inside" (1987, 63) He asks, in typically cryptic phrasing with odd punctuation, "What if the lack formed the frame of the theory. Not its accident but its frame. More or less still: what if the lack were not only the lack of a theory of the frame but the place of the lack in a theory of the frame" (1987, 42-43).

This non-economic is not simply a passive excluded outside, it is also a source of disruption and trouble for the economy that attempts to fix (by unfixing) it. Economists sometimes call elements of this outside "externalities" (see Callon 1998) and they can appear as actants which threaten the stability of theories, raise far-too-complicated questions about the work of analysis, or--in the material form of pollution, for example-- threaten to kill those very economists and flood their cities.<sup>54</sup> The outside is unruly and dangerous, but like all outlaw domains, is also a powerful source of creativity, power and possibility. If there is an outside, then this means that the *inside* can be wholly reconfigured. In terms of our work of imagining and enacting other economies, this calls us to recognize, to cultivate and to articulate--with our ontologies and with our concrete organizing projects--"content that does not lie within the boundaries of existing metaphors and metaphors with boundaries that are not synchronous with observed relationships" (Gibson, Cahill, and McKay 2010, 5, citing Koppel et al. 1994).

We arrive, finally, at the fourth opening: the plurality of worlds. No performance, no ontology, no world, exists alone. We might say, in fact, that there is no world, there are only *worlds* (Latour 2004; Mol 1998). For Mol, performativity is not about the process of bringing a single world into being, of constructing "the" world or "a" reality; rather, it involves an endless and complex multiplicity. "In performance stories," she describes, "fleshiness, opacity and weight are not attributes of a single object with an essence which hides. Nor is it the role of tools to lay them bare as if they were so many aspects of a

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<sup>54</sup> I'm referring here, of course, to pollution-induced disease and climate change. It is important to note, however, that those most impacted by economists' externalities are not (immediately and most apparently, at least) the economists themselves, but people--often people of color--whose needs, struggles and sometime very existence has also been traditionally externalized from conventional (white, colonial) academia.

single reality. Instead of attributes or aspects, they are different versions of the object, versions that the tools help to enact...They are multiple forms of reality. Itself" (1998, 77). Hegemony, in other words, is never the name of a singular world or a project that stands alone claiming a unique terrain. There are always, simultaneously, other worlds, other accounts, other ontologies that make claims and enlist beings into their world-making projects.

It is this multiplicity that allows Gibson-Graham to proclaim that "other economies are already here" and to build a postcapitalist politics on the premise that "diverse languages [and practices] of economy already exist... [and] to produce a potential dislocation of the hegemony of capitalocentric discourse, we need to identify and begin to liberate these alternative languages from their discursive subordination" (Gibson-Graham 2006, 57). Singular hegemony is an impossible project and thus will always (eventually) rupture under the pressure of other worlds that lie in wait or that co-exist. We can work to aid this. We can construct other worlds from the very position that there already *are* other worlds and our recognition of the processes of performative construction can aid us in being strategic about how we bring these worlds to the forefront of public political struggle.

### **Performative Strategy**

We arrive, then, at the question of strategy. While recognizing that choosing a provisional ontology (and such a choice is always provisional) does not in itself make the world anew, we must also take responsibility for the possibility that our ontologies can

become important tools in new world-making projects. How, then, to choose? What is at stake in such choices? How do we decide what kinds of ontologies might be worth experimenting with, trying on, performing? These are questions about what Mol calls "ontological politics," that is, an engagement with questions about our agential capacities and ethical responsibilities to choose our ontological stances, claims and performances (1998).<sup>55</sup> "Ontological politics [is] about what is or could be made more real" (Law and Urry 2004, 396). This implies a strong pragmatic move from concerns about the "accuracy" of the discourses produced to critical investigation and reflection on the potential effects of such discourses. As Gibson-Graham describes:

This vision of the performativity of knowledge, its implication in what it purports to describe, its productive power of 'making', has placed new responsibility on the shoulders of scholars – to recognize their constitutive role in the worlds that exist, and their power to bring new worlds into being. Not single-handedly, of course, but alongside other world-makers, both inside and outside the academy (2008, 2).

Engaging questions of strategy, Mol (1998) identifies four questions to ask ourselves about a given ontological intervention: What is at stake? Are there really options? Where are the options? How should we choose? These can be usefully framed in light of our concerns for the politics of economic ontology:

- *What is at stake?* What is an economy? What does or could the word refer to, mobilize, articulate? Why does this definition and performance matter? I have explored some of the implications of the economic ontologies of conventional

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<sup>55</sup> Mol explains: "Ontological politics is a composite term. It talks of ontology--which is standard philosophical parlance defines what belongs to the real, to the conditions of possibility we live with. if the term 'ontology' is combined with that of 'politics' then this suggests that the conditions of possibility are not given. That reality does not precede the mundane practices in which we interact with it, but is rather shaped by these practices" (1998, 75).

RED in Chapter 1, but how else can economy be conceptualized and how might this matter? This will be the focus of Chapter 3.

- *Are there really options?* Asked differently: *what is possible?* What are the limits to possibility and how can they be known or discovered? I will address this question briefly in the following section.
- *Where are the options?* "If there are various ways to perform deviances, it might seem that there is, or should be, a choice between them. But where, at which site,...might this be located?" (Mol 1998, 79). This is a tricky question, for as Mol points out, the options may not be visible or intelligible within the terrain in which the problem itself has been posed. This is precisely the world-making power of performative ontologies--in covering over their own production, the array of possible alternative worlds is also hidden. Thus we must engage in imaginative and exploratory practices of thought and perception that might open up space to see our choices.
- *How should we choose?* As Gibson-Graham asks, "How can our work open up possibilities? What kind of world do we want to participate in building? What might be the effect of theorizing things this way rather than that?" (2008, 2). This is, perhaps, the strategic crux of ontological politics.

Our strategies regarding the performance of various ontologies (economic or otherwise) must be informed by at least three dimensions. First, the ethical: we must ask,



when engaging or formulating economic representations, "what are the *effects* we are seeking?" (Mol 1998, 86). Ontology here is not posed as something upon which we ground our action or strategy, but rather as an experimental stance that arises from an ethical impulse, from collective ethical negotiation; *ethics, in this sense, precedes ontology*. Human engagements with the processes of world-making are always constituted within/as what De Angelis (2007, 24; following McMurtry 1998) calls "value systems"--articulated webs of value practices through which we engage in making the social, in constructing some forms of relationship (and some forms of ontology) and not others.<sup>56</sup> As De Angelis describes, "the articulation between individuals and whole, parts and totality, implies that it is by pursuing value that we reproduce wholes, that is webs of co-production. Therefore, different types of value pursuits reproduce different types of wholes, of different self-organizing systems, of 'societies' (2007, 25). For Gibson-Graham, this world-making process of ethical negotiation is expressed through the notion of being-in-common (drawn from Jean-Luc Nancy), in which being-together is understood as the very condition of life itself. The process of *making worlds together* calls for us to view economy (and, presumably society and nature) as "an ethical space of becoming in which interdependence is acknowledged and enlarged" (2008c, 156).

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<sup>56</sup> I do not mean to close off the possibility here that "value practices" can be understood as animating world-making processes beyond the domain of the human. In fact, the emerging field of biosemiotics--inspired in part by Maturana and Varela's (1980; Maturana 2002; Varela 1992; Luisi 2003) theories of autopoietic cognition as a definition of life--seeks to represent life itself as fundamentally a process of making meaning and distinction--in other words, as constituted in and through a kind of value practice through which relationships between molecular entities become (as an emergent property of self-organization) relationships between significant (and signified) beings (Hoffmeyer 1996; Hoffmeyer 1997; Wheeler 2006). I will leave it for another project, however, to further explore the fascinating implications of these ideas.

As I have discussed in Chapter 1, the ontologies performed by conventional RED emerge from and call forth a constellation of value practices that shrink, rather than enlarge, spaces for the acknowledgement and expansion of ethical interdependence. Separating a domain of human livelihood ("the economy") from the social, political and ecological; constituting this domain as a coherent system; delineating its elements in such a way as to exclude vast realms of work and provision; pitting one region against the others in a compulsion toward quantitative growth--these are ontological claims and effects that emerge from and confirm a particular *value system*. Our work of challenging conventional RED and of developing other pathways for regional development must be--first and foremost--the work of experimenting with ontologies, relationships and practices that articulate *other values* and that work to create a world hospitable to and affirming of such values.

The question of how to choose our ontological performances is not, from a strategic perspective, *just* a question of values and aspirations, but also one of *efficacy*. This is a second key dimension: the most ethical, caring, cooperative economic ontology will not become a successful point of articulation unless it is also capable of enlisting myriad human and nonhuman actants. This doesn't mean that it has to live up to kind of criteria for "viability" proposed (or, more often, imposed) by the ontologies of conventional RED, but it does mean that it must be capable of *constructing the material conditions of its own viability* and it must take this aspect of the work of performance seriously. Polanyi's notion of "supporting structures," which I will explore in Chapter 3, may be helpful here.

Finally, we must be clear that the viability and efficacy of a performance is also about what it mobilizes *inside* of us, how it subjects us, how it contributes to forming us as feeling and desiring beings. As Gibson-Graham suggest, following Collective Situaciones, "combating capitalism means refusing a long-standing sense of self and mode of being in the world, while simultaneously cultivating new forms of sociability, vision of happiness, and economic capacities" (2006b, xxxv). Different ontologies may help to generate and sustain different modes of subjectivity and thus enable (or disable) different forms of "ethical self-cultivation," that is, processes of telling and enacting narratives, engaging in practices, and seeking forms of feeling and thought that construct us as subjects in the world (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxvii). We must ask of a given ontological account how this way of articulating our being-in-common might enable, for example, modes of feeling and identification that beckon toward solidarity and care for others. What kinds of desires does this ontology encourage or suppress? Is our sense of capacity, personal and collective power, and possibility kindled or quenched by this mode of engaging?

### **A Note on Necessity and Possibility**

We arrive, at this point in the chapter, to a fundamental ambiguity in this way of thinking about performativity. Having started with an account of the specific performativity of language and concepts and then introduced, in an uncertain and perhaps unknowable mixture, the complex materialities of actants, we end up being unable to easily tease out how powerful discourse--an economic ontology, for example--actually

*might be* as a world-making force. When all the chips are down, when all the actants are accounted for, do human conceptual discourses really *make worlds*? This is a good question, but here's the catch: it's impossible for us to know the answer. Even the most careful ANT analysis will not be able to decide, "accurately" and ultimately, the extent to which it was Adam Smith or the parliamentary enclosures that contributed "more" the making of conventional RED's economic ontology. This is precisely because such an analysis can never stand outside of itself; to ask the questions is to participate in the very process of constituting that which the questions are about. What is required--demanded by the performativity of meaning-making itself--is a certain kind of agnosticism about the power of discourse to perform reality into being. We know (as the story of the making of economy at the beginning of this chapter attests) that concepts are sometimes, and in some ways, powerful; we will never know exactly *how* powerful. And this is precisely the point.

Not everything is possible, but we can't know beforehand what is *impossible*, and our collective exercise of creativity and agency can expand the spaces of possibility through imagination, experimentation and struggle (Unger 1978; 2004; Gibson-Graham 2005). As Callon writes, "there is no universal rule to indicate *a priori* what is possible and what is not" (2005, 9). This is not simply a question of epistemology, of knowing (or not) the possible; it is *ontological*. If the world is materialized through ongoing, complex and contested relationships between diverse actants, then the *possible itself* is made only in and through this process as well. Thus the possible should not be conceived as a limit that "exists" and that we do or do not yet know, a horizon that we have or have not

yet reached. It has no edge defined or definable prior to a moment experienced as "failure." It is not a cave wall that cannot yet be seen beyond the dim edges of the fire-circle of possibility, and the project of "expanding possibility" is not like adding fuel to the torch to increase the size of the circle. Rather, the possible should be understood as *made* at each moment of enactment, actualized from a virtual that is the undecidable from which worlds are made (Deleuze and Parnet 2002). The possible is a limit that is built and transformed through material and discursive struggle.

When we come to a wall, we figure out how to bypass or break it. We follow pathways until we encounter obstacles; then--how do we see and deal with these obstacles? Are they really obstacles or might they be opportunities? Gibson-Graham highlight an approach to theorizing economic possibility that neither ignores obstacles nor permits them to become limits. Responding to a commentary by Kelly in which he raises concerns about her theory's lack of engagement with "fundamental circumstances" of oppressive structural power (Kelly 2005, 41), she writes:

Whereas Kelly identifies them as limits, thereby presumptively circumscribing (limiting) the potential success of community economies, we have tended to speak of them as challenges, problems, barriers, difficulties--in other words, things to be struggled with, things that present themselves as more or less tractable obstacles in any political project (2005b, 123).

Like Gibson-Graham, I am "more concerned to theorize the conditions of possibility than limits to possibility, seeing the latter path as prematurely foreclosing an open and uncertain future" (Gibson-Graham 2005, 123).<sup>57</sup> The space of possibility is undecidable,

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<sup>57</sup> In another text, Gibson-Graham elaborates: "Lest ontological reframing be mistaken for a simplistic assertion that we can think ourselves out of the materiality of capitalism or repressive state practices, we should affirm that our orientation toward possibility does not deny the forces that militate against it—forces that may work to undermine, constrain, destroy, or sideline our attempts to reshape economic futures. The practice of thinking overdetermination as a mode of ontological reframing simply encour-

and emerges from ongoing material-semiotic conversation with the actors of our world(s). Our task is to engage in this exploration, this experimentalism, and *to develop theory that enables such exploration*. Scholarship, in this approach, is understood to be in the *service* of collective action rather than at its helm seeking (or attempting) to determine its direction and strategy (Graeber 2004; Shukaitis 2003).

Indeed, the point is not to decide about the limits to the possible, but to engage in experiments *at the limits*, to cultivate and visibilize experimentation at the perceived limits so as to expand the very space of possibility itself. "In experimentation," write Roelvink and Gibson-Graham, "there's no active transformative subject 'learning about' a separate inert object, but a subject-object that is a 'becoming world.'" (2009, 133). Such an approach recognizes that "the viability of social transformation is rarely a fact; it is, rather, something that must be constructed" (Corragio 1997). This also implies that theory cannot answer questions about the possible; in a performative approach a move must be made--at some point, by someone--to "put down the books" and organize to seek, challenge and (collectively) reconstitute the limits of the possible.

### **Conclusion: Ontological Questions**

To attempt a summary, then, of my conclusions about performativity (and possibility) that can help to guide my exploration of alternative economic ontologies in the following chapter, I propose the following clusters of questions:

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ages us to deny these forces a fundamental, structural, or universal reality and to instead identify them as contingent outcomes of ethical decisions, political projects, and sedimented localized practices, continually pushed and pulled by other determinations" (2006b, xxxi).

- Does a given ontology help to render the being-in-common of life, our constitutive togetherness, more visible? Does it aid us in seeing the points of interrelationship in which ethical negotiation becomes possible? Does it expand the possibility of solidarity between and among people, human and nonhuman?
- Who or what is split into parts by this ontology? Who or what is made invisible or banished to the margins? What marks, in other words, the constitutive outside of this discourse and the categories that it constitutes?
- Does a given ontology enable us to take advantage of gaps or ruptures in hegemonic economic performances? Does it seduce or enlist beings and relationships who had previously been cut in parts by the conventional ontological lines of demarcation or excluded from view or consideration as legitimate "economic" entities? Does it mobilize and connect with already-congealing processes of world formation that are challenging, eclipsing, or waiting in the shadows behind the hegemonic world of economic "common sense"?
- More generally, does a given ontology enlist a robust array of human and nonhuman actants in ways that might strengthen its own performance? Does it, in this way, appear capable of presenting itself with the kind of power, solidity and potential durability required of a new hegemonic formation? Does it, in conventional analytical terms, appear to "explain" or "describe" a common world?

- To the extent that it does this, does it describe a common world in *which we would want to live*? That is, does it figure in its performance not only that which we seek to undo (but cannot ignore), but also *that which is already present or emerging* into which we might lean and on behalf of which we might dedicate our creative energies? Another way to ask this question: does it inspire us to hope and to work with joy and inspiration toward new ways of being together?

These questions can, I believe, form a rough framework for exploring alternative economic ontologies and their potential strategic effects. There are, of course, no guarantees, and the effects of any production always exceed their makers' ability to know, understand or predict. But nor do we have to go blindly: equipped with tools for thinking that aid us in cultivating consciousness about some of the key issues and questions at stake in the production and enactment of ontological accounts, we can perhaps engage more strategically and effectively in the work of articulating new economic relationships and ways of being-in-common.

To be clear, and to reiterate a point: creating new ontological accounts, by itself, does very little. Creating such accounts with a strategic awareness of how they might be articulated with other world-making processes and relationships--and then engaging, in one way or another, with the hard, dirty, daily, quite un-theoretical work of "assembling the collective" to make new worlds; this might get us somewhere. To close with wisdom from Latour: "There is no rear-world behind to be used as a judge of this one, but in this lowly world there lie in wait many more worlds that may aspire to become one--or not, depending on the assembly work we will be able to achieve" (2005, 118).



## CHAPTER 3

### ENABLING FRAMEWORKS FOR RETHINKING ECONOMY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF LIVELIHOODS

With the work of Chapter 2 as a context, I wish now to explore some possible directions that a project of "ontological reframing" (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxx) might go. My journey will retrace the general pattern of Chapter 1, beginning with an inquiry into the question of "the economy" as an ontological claim and then moving into an engagement with a variety of frameworks for elaborating on the specific structures, relationships and dimensions of an alternative economic ontology, including the "substantive" economic framework of Polanyi (1977; 1992), the market/mutuality theory of Gudeman (2001; 2008; 2002) various discourses on the "commons" (De Angelis 2003; Helfrich 2009; Nonini 2006; Siefkes 2009) and Gibson-Graham's framework for "diverse economies" (2006b). I will conclude with some thoughts that bring elements of these approaches together.

#### **Economic Ontology: Should We Perform "Economy"?**

"If our categories are potentially implicated in shaping our worlds," suggests Gibson-Graham, "care and conscience are required in their deployment" (2006a, xxi). My work in Chapter 1 proposed that the very concept of "the economy" is highly problematic. Separated out from society and nature, the economy constitutes a domain of systematic necessity beyond the reach of ethics and politics, to which only experts have

access and which determines the limits of relational possibility for communities and regions subjected to its claims. Does this not then suggest that we should reject the concept itself? Given its history, its weight and its complicity in multiple forms of colonization and exploitation, shouldn't our struggle be against the *very notion* of an economy? Should we not be seeking concepts that are wholly different, and that contribute toward healing and transforming the divisive and constraining effects that economic ontologies have brought upon us?

This is tempting, to be sure. I wish to suggest, however, that a more nuanced and strategic approach to the issue may be helpful. There is, first of all, a significantly strategic dimension to consider that harkens back to my discussion in Chapter 2 of the need to mobilize and enlist allies as a requisite for successful performative discourses. A vast amount of energy and resources has been expended on the project of articulating "the economy" as a nodal point of social organization, and, as a consequence, the concept has become a site of great emotional and material investment. "As a powerful everyday concept," write Gibson-Graham, "'the economy' has libidinal and affective purchase; people pay attention when we start playing around with it--thinking about it differently, for instance, or working to build a different economy" (2006a, xxi). From a strategic standpoint, then, to concede the terrain marked out by "the economy" to discourses such as conventional RED is to concede perhaps one of the most powerful performative tools available to struggles for liberatory social transformation. Like Gibson-Graham, I am inclined to hold on to this discourse in some way, seeking to subvert and transform its meaning but drawing on its widely-recognized import and (deserved or not) acclaim.

This would be a naive and dangerous strategy if it were not for a second dimension. To claim that the concept of economy is non-reformable, non-transformable--that is, to advocate for its abandonment--is to fall into a trap of seeing "the economy" as containing an essential set of properties or characteristics. Such a way of thinking would be an abandonment of the concepts of performativity and discursive struggle that I discussed in the previous chapter. Rather than viewed as an already-decided, always-fixed domain of meaning, "the economy" should be understood as a "floating signifier." In Laclau and Mouffe's terms, this means that discourses of the economic should be seen as sites of struggle, points of antagonism where the resignification of the concept is not only possible but crucial to the construction of new ways of knowing and being.

For Laclau and Mouffe, "any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre" (2001, 112). Such centers are called "nodal points," and they are the locations of connection through which the articulation of political identities and discursive formations are solidified. Far from being fixed, they are continually open to contestation and subversion; they are, in fact, the very points of struggle that when made vulnerable to transformation *define* the political. It is the "the ultimately unfixed character of every signifier," the fact that all signifiers "float," which makes politics possible (2001, 88). To assume that a given nodal point is irreparably co-opted or captured by a given hegemonic discourse is to concede far too much: "it is a dangerous illusion," write Laclau and Mouffe, "to think that [floating signifiers] are assured once and for all, that the terrain which has constituted their discursive conditions of emergence cannot be subverted" (2001, 141).

Rather than viewing the economy as an already-decided ontological claim, and constituting its currently destructive effects as essences that cannot be undone, we can understand the economy as a site of struggle, a nodal point around which multiple (new) meanings can be condensed and new actants enlisted and mobilized in transformative configurations. Indeed, if "the economy" has been resignified in fundamental ways continuously since at least the late 18th century, then it can (and will) certainly be resignified again. The key to such work is to be vigilantly aware of the specific ontological content that has come to haunt the concept; while we can engage in struggles to resignify, we must ward off our own capture by past significations. How easy it might be to reconstitute "the economy" as an *alternative* coherent, law-like system governed by whatever social dynamics we wish to campaign on behalf of! It is in light of such a danger that we must begin our work with a sense that, whatever "economy" means when we've done our work of rethinking, it will be something that no longer shares the same referent its current hegemonic ancestor. We are not resignifying the economy as a thing that is "out there"; rather, we are using the empty (but powerful) term to construct a wholly different web of signification.

### **Resignifying Economy**

If conventional discourses of economy have constructed a concept that enables the separation of economy from all other social, political and ecological dynamics and relationships, then one key task of a restorative resignification of economy is to develop concepts that challenge these divisions. We must ask how economy might be

reconceptualized in such a way as to shift it from constituting a systemic object immune to ethics and politics to something far more open, relational and negotiable. How do we avoid producing a new version of a notion of economy as "a distinct field of social activity which can be carved out of the totality of social relations' exists and can be studied in isolation" (Narotzky 1997, 4)? Karl Polanyi's notion of "substantive economics," further developed in literature on the "livelihoods approach" to development, offers one pathway that such a project might take. Gibson-Graham's formulation of the "community economy" offers another. In conversation, along with a perspective that considers nonhuman livelihoods as central to any human economic processes, these approaches begin to suggest an alternative landscape upon which a different kind of ethical economic practice might be imagined and constructed.

### *Substantive Economics*

Polanyi begins his resignification of economics by making an important distinction between "formal" and "substantive" forms of economy and economic analysis. As he proposes, "the term economic is a compound of two meanings that have independent roots. We will call them the substantive and the formal meaning...the two root meanings of 'economic'...have nothing in common" (1992, 29). Formal economics, for Polanyi, is the analytical manifestation of the *economistic fallacy*, an understanding of economy that is restricted to the operation of rational, calculative choice<sup>58</sup> in the face of

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58 The distinction between "formal" and "substantive" is derived from Weber's distinction between "formal rationality" (calculative reason) and "substantive rationality" (rationality in which a value commitment is involved). (Gudeman 2008, 5). Also called calculative reason, rational choice, instrumental reason: "This mode of reason has a linear form in which means and ends are linked with the means selected for

scarcity and in the transactional context of price-making markets.<sup>59</sup> Concerned only with a particular instance of culturally-specific instrumental rationality<sup>60</sup>, formal economics is ultimately "an analytical method devised for a special form of the economy, which [is] dependent upon the presence of specific market elements" (Polanyi 1992, 30). This utility of this approach is quite limited, such that in a formalist framework, "outside of a system of price-making markets economic analysis loses most of its relevance as a method of inquiry into the working of the economy" (1992, 33).

While formal economics, in Polanyi's view, claims "a semantic monopoly of the term *economic*" (1977, 24), there is a fundamentally different way to approach the analysis of economic life: that is, through the *substantive* lens. In this framing, economy refers to all of the complex processes through which humans sustain themselves in relation to each other and nature. As Polanyi writes (using his archaic "man" language), "The substantive meaning of economic derives from man's dependence for his living

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the ends, or the ends chosen in light of the means, usually according to a standard of maximization or optimization" (Gudeman 2008, 6). Significantly manifest in the calculation and use of ratios. "The economic variant of rationalism introduces the scarcity element into all means-ends relations; moreover, it posits as rational, in regard to the ends and the means themselves, two different value scales that happen to be particularly adapted to market situations but otherwise have no universal claim to be called rational" (Polanyi 1977, 13).

59 Polanyi traces formal economics to Carl Menger: "Neoclassical economics was established on Carl Menger's premise [1871] that the appropriate concern of economics was the allocation of insufficient means to provide for man's livelihood. This was the first statement of the postulate of scarcity or maximization" (Polanyi 1977, 21). Yet, as Polanyi also points out, Menger made--towards the end of his life--a significant distinction between the "two 'elemental directions'" in which economics could go: "one of which was the economizing direction stemming from the insufficiency of means, while the other was the 'technoeconomic' direction, as [Menger] called it, derived from the physical requirements of production regardless of the sufficiency or insufficiency of means" (Polanyi 1977, 22). Neoclassical economics proceeded to ignore Menger's second direction, yet for Polanyi it beckons toward the distinction between "formal" and "substantive."

60 Polanyi does not mince words here: "While [formal economics] claimed to be empirical, it was no more than a dogmatic assertion covering up an arbitrary definition and a specific historical circumstance" (1977, 29).

upon nature and his fellows. It refers to the interchange with his natural and social environment, in so far as this results in supplying him with the means of material want satisfaction" (1992, 29). Polanyi traces substantive economic thinking to Aristotle, who saw that "the economy--in the first place a matter of the domestic household--concerns the relationships of the persons who make up such institutions as the household or other 'natural' units like the polis. His concept of the economy then, denotes *an institutionalized process through which sustenance is ensured*" (Polanyi 1977, 30 italics mine).<sup>61</sup> This is a far cry from the formalist approach:

The substantive meaning implies neither choice nor insufficiency of means; man's livelihood may or may not involve the necessity of choice and, if choice there be, it need not be induced by the limiting effect of 'scarcity' of the means; indeed, some of the most important physical and social conditions of livelihood such as the availability of air and water or a loving mother's devotion to her infant are not, as a rule, so limiting (Polanyi 1992, 29).

There is no possible way, in such an account, to clearly delineate a domain of the "economic" from that of the "social" or "ecological." The economy is, in this framing, transformed from a *sphere* or a specific *phenomenon* to a heterogeneous web of relational and institutional *processes*. Such a shift is marked by Polanyi's use of the term "livelihood" as a stand-in or substitute for "economy." In place of an abstract sphere of logic within which human drama unfolds, there now stands a *process of enacting livelihoods*. As Torgerson summarizes, "the key economic question...[is] how do human beings effect and interchange with the rest of nature so as to provide for their collective livelihood?" (2001, 477). This grammar of livelihood is distinctive: unlike economy, it

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61 This tight definition of economy is summarized by Polanyi elsewhere in the following way: humans "survive by virtue of an institutionalized interaction between [themselves] and [their] natural surroundings. That process is the economy" (1977, 20).

does not stand alone to designate any kind of space, domain, sphere or object; one cannot speak about "the livelihood" as some overarching domain of collective provision without modifying it to specify a *person or group* engaged in that provision (as in *The Livelihood of Man*," the title of Polanyi's posthumously-published text). Livelihoods are clearly made, produced, struggled over; and livelihoods are clearly about more than markets, money, jobs, and dynamics of growth and competition. "By examining of the variety of existing modalities of circulation," write Calışkan and Callon, "substantivism has underscored the diversity of economic rationalities that can prevail on both a collective and an individual level" (2009, 375).

Within the field of international development, a concept of livelihoods similar to (and perhaps derived from) that of Polanyi has been taken up as an alternative to the kinds of narrow, economistic approaches that proliferate among donors, NGOs and international financial institutions. Often referred to as the "sustainable livelihoods approach" (Chambers and Conway 1991; Scoones 1998), this development discourse and practice asserts that the well-being of people and communities cannot be addressed unless their activities and contexts are placed in a wider (non-economistic) frame. Livelihood is seen as a concept that "best expresses the idea of individuals or groups striving to make a living, attempting to meet their various consumption and economic necessities, coping with uncertainties, responding to new opportunities, and choosing between different value positions" (De Haan and Zoomers 2005, 32). The analysis of livelihood places emphasis on this wide set of factors and processes, examining elements such as "contexts, conditions and trends," "livelihood resources," "institutional processes and organizational



structures," "livelihood strategies" and "sustainable livelihood outcomes" (Scoones 1998, 4). Such an approach opens up the terrain for a whole host of actors, relationships and dynamics to become visible as constitutive elements of an economic process.

A clarification, however, is necessary. Formulated as a binary, formal and substantive economic frameworks risk being viewed as two options for analyzing the same object. The critique of formalism, in other words, can be problematically framed in terms of an "inaccurate" picture of what the economy "actually is." Polanyi, in claiming that "the fount of the substantive economy is the empirical economy" (Polanyi 1992, 33), falls into precisely this trap. The danger mentioned earlier in this chapter, of old ontologies creeping in through the back door, presents itself here. I prefer, therefore, to formulate the distinction between formal and substantive perspectives not as night-and-day differences in analytical focus, but rather as a difference between *night and space*. "Formal" can be seen to name not so much the particular schools of economic thought that assume a rational, self-interested agent maximizing personal good in the context of scarce resources (though this is certainly the dominant type of "formal" economics), but rather any economics that purports to reduce the complexity and diversity of a given human economy into a simple, formulaic scheme of singular motivation. In contrast to this monolithic view, I would define "substantive" economics as a broader economics of difference--one that is capable of seeing and valuing the simultaneity of multiple economies and multiple economic rationalities interrelating in the context of inseparable social, political, and ecological relationships.

## Community Economy

Gibson-Graham's approach to resignifying the economy has much in common with Polanyi's substantive economics. Like Polanyi, her efforts emerge from a strong concern that the hegemonic ontologies and analytical practices of (capitalist) economics have substantially narrowed the space of economic imagination. Also like Polanyi, Gibson-Graham is interested in generating a conception of the economic that both visibilizes the diversity of livelihood practices that exist and shifts the emphasis of analysis from that of a *system* to that of a *process*. Her primary departures from Polanyi's approach, I would argue, lie in her attentiveness to performativity and in her specific engagements with ontology such that a division between the social and the natural is avoided.<sup>62</sup> Gibson-Graham's formulation of the community economy suggest, in fact, that Polanyi was only able to go part-way in his attempt to undo formalist economics. To go all the way, it may be necessary to break apart the concept of an empirical economy altogether and to start "from scratch," so-to-speak, with the nature of being itself. For such a task, Gibson-Graham enlists the work of Jean-Luc Nancy.

Nancy's intent is to "explicitly theorize the sociality of all relations" (Gibson-Graham 2006, 82). In place of an ontology of Being, in which existence is defined with

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<sup>62</sup> Polanyi's ontology suffers from at least two key weaknesses. First, it remains wedded to a kind of realist epistemology such that alternative economic concepts such as those proposed through substantivism are understood to name a real "economic" landscape. Calışkan and Callon (2009) assert, in this sense, an essential commonality between formalist and substantivist approaches. Both view "economy" as an object that can be defined (and thus can contain various classes of entities or rationalities understood as "economic"), rather than seeing it as a process of performative definition itself ("economization"). Second, Polanyi's ontology continues to perform the stability of the society/nature distinction. Economy is effectively socialized, but that sociality is still ontologically separated (albeit bound in a relation process) from "nature." As Calışkan and Callon write, "where formalism made the rational individual the cornerstone of their theoretical framework, substantivism placed the notion of society and the institutions derived from it" (2009, 374).

some substantive content (be it categories such as economy, society and nature, or particular definitions of community and connection), Nancy proposes an empty ontology of "being in-common" (Nancy 1991a). Here, "the meaning of being is not common, and yet the in-common of being transpierces all meaning" (Nancy 1991a, 5). Without making any specific claims about the nature of being itself, Nancy asserts, we can still say that *all beings share in its togetherness*. Existence is characterized by a fundamental co-presence. "Nothing and nobody," writes Nancy, "can be born without being born to and with others who come into this encounter, who are born in their own turn" (2000, 61).

In contrast to much Western thought, which begins with the separate individual (object, person, atom) and then seeks to understand how they might become connected, an ontology of being in-common assumes that individuals emerge as always-partial and always-problematic moments of a constitutive relationality. For Nancy, individuals do not come together, pre-formed, in a world to meet, compete, or cooperate; rather, the coming-together (always prior to any "individual") *is itself the making of the world* (Nancy 2000, 44). Put differently, "community and communication are constitutive of individuality, rather than the reverse, and individuality is perhaps, in the final analysis, only a boundary of community" (Hutchens 2005, 117). All being is characterized, then, by social connection; that is, there is no practice, no action, which is not always already emergent from and constitutive of sociality.

It is this ontology that Gibson-Graham seeks to build upon in her performative retheorization of economy. Far from being an asocial, autonomous and self-directed (i.e., beyond human control and decision) presence, economy becomes a "community

economy," a being-in-common that is continually produced and negotiated by its participants. Economy is, for Gibson-Graham, *entirely social*, "an ethical space of interdependence" such that "the dynamics of economic change can be seen to emerge from negotiations among (human and non-human) beings rather than unseen structural forces" (2008c, 156). The distinction that some have drawn from Polanyi (thanks to his own ambiguity) between a socially "embedded" and "disembedded" economic process (Adaman, Devine, and Ozkaynak 2003) is here collapsed into a different set of conceptual cuts. As Gibson-Graham point out, both Marx and Nancy argue that "community is not eradicated by the mediation of capitalist commodity relations, but takes on a different meaning and form" (2006b, 84); Nancy re-frames the difference as one between the "socially exposed particularity [of communism], in opposition to the socially imploded generality characteristic of capitalist community" (quoted by Gibson-Graham 2006b, 84). In other words, capitalist (and conventional RED) economics performs a kind of sociality that renders ethical interrelationship *invisible* behind a veil of conceptual and material borders. It is not an *absence* of sociality, but its active *denial*.

This is the dynamic that Gibson-Graham's notion of the community economy seeks to break. Beginning with a recognition that all economic relationships--the ways that we constitute livelihoods together--are emergent from a constitutive sociality, she enables an approach to the economic that restores the visibility of relations and the agency of actants. "Resocializing (and repoliticizing) the economy," she suggests, "involves making explicit the sociality that is always present, and thus constituting the various forms and practices of interdependence as matters for reflection, discussion,

negotiation, and action" (2006b, 88). The interrelations that were split, ruptured or rendered invisible in conventional RED are able, now, to return to the picture of economic life as complex manifestations of being-together on earth. Refusing the ontological divide imposed by hegemonic conceptions of a distinct economy, we can again ask "the question of how to live together" (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 82).

Gibson-Graham's use of the term "community economy" may bring about a certain kind of ambiguity or confusion in readers (and users, as the concept circulates). It would be easy, for example, to associate the concept with geographical notions of community as locality, or to link it with normative discourses regarding communal values of cooperation and mutual-aid (see Gibson-Graham 2006b, 86). "Community economy," in such an interpretation, could be placed alongside other "alternatives" such as "local economy," "green economy," "cooperative economy" or "solidarity economy." This is, however, merely an unfortunate effect of grammar, where "community" appears as the adjective of the pair. I read Gibson-Graham as suggesting instead that "community" be understood not as a modifier of "economy," but rather as its always-open *ground* of signification. Community economy does not indicate a specific notion or form of being-together, nor does it imply a particular set of economic structures, processes or relations. It suggests, instead, that all livelihoods are made together and that *economy is the process of negotiating this making*. "Both economic interdependence and ethics," writes Gibson-Graham, "are to be defined, decided, and 'deemed' by the 'community' being constituted through the process of shared decision-making" (2005b, 121).<sup>63</sup>

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63 De Angelis presents a very similar understanding of "community," understood as "the domain of relational modes, the problematic of how free individuals who are self-aware as being part of a social body in which they are related to each other, articulate their co-production. Neither Marx nor anybody else could answer this questions. Only living subjects in struggle and cooperation can pose the question

A further question may arise, similar to that asked in regard to Butler's notion of performativity in Chapter 2: who are the active *subjects* of a community economy? Are they primarily *human*? In Nancy, we find this to be an open question. Writing of the "being-in-common of existing beings," he notes parenthetically that "here I am bracketing the question of whether to extend 'existence' to all beings or only to certain of them such as people, or animals, and so forth" (1991b, 1). Why such hesitancy? How, in fact, can such a question even arise? An ontology of being-in-common, lest it become an ontology of being-*mostly*-in-common, cannot rest on an ontological divide between the human (or the animal) and all else. Why, other than a conceit (or insecurity) to retain some sense of human superiority, should such a discourse persist? Lynn Margulis would say to Nancy (and to any attempts to develop a conception of community economy centered only on the human): *no more brackets*.

While Gibson-Graham is resignifying the *economy* by drawing on an ontology of being in-common, Margulis and her collaborators are challenging conventional accounts of biology, ecology, and the nature of life in a similar vein. Against Neo-Darwinian models positing evolution as driven by individual selection through random genetic mutation (the biological analogue, arguably, of neoclassical economics), Margulis and Sagan describe the "chimeric nature of being" through the theory of symbiogenesis: that "all cells evolved from accumulation and genetic integration of once free-living symbionts" (2007, 42).<sup>64</sup> Significant evidence has been collected (i.e., increasingly stable

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of community as part of the problematic of the beginning of history, of their history" (2007, 242).

64 "According to symbiogenesis theory, *the accumulation of random mutation plays a minor, modulating-only role in evolution*" (Hird 2010a, 739, emphasis in original).

collections of actants have been enlisted) suggesting the chloroplasts and mitochondria--and possibly other cellular organelles--in eukaryotic (nucleated) cells are in fact former bacteria that took up residence inside other once-prokaryotic cells (Margulis 1981; 1999; Margulis and Fester 1991; Margulis and Sagan 2003).

As with Nancy's sense that the individual emerges from an essential sociality (rather than the other way around, as is often conceived), symbiogenesis suggests that "individuals are all diversities of co-evolving associates" (Margulis, quoted in Hird 2009, 65).<sup>65</sup> Life does not exist without community, without being in-common: "life is an orgy of attractions" (Margulis and Sagan 1995, 157). This biological account of being in-common has the potential to re-orient our sense of the "social" at multiple levels. Life is "a literal enmeshing of bodies and all of their resident companion species (and those species') in a recursive cascade... 'all the way down'" (Hird 2010, 36, quoting Haraway 2008). From the scale of Gaia, a name for our planet's complex living processes of self-regulation and self-transformation (Lovelock 2000; Volk 2003; Harding 2006), to the scale of the microscopic bacteria that form the laboring basis for nearly all biological energy production and transformation, we are bound together in myriad interrelationships that are themselves the very conditions of existence for our "we."

When we cease to think of ourselves as singular, self-contained beings and begin to identify, instead (for example), with the multiple communities of bacteria and bacterial symbionts from which we (continually) take shape and of which we are (fleeting, temporary) manifestations, or when we place our activities in the context of a billions-of-

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<sup>65</sup> Said differently: "The individual autonomous self does not accurately describe organisms. They are temporal and spatial assemblages formed and remade through processes of contagion and filiation" (Hird 2008, 739), in other words, communities.

years-old, emergent, planetary-scale process of biological self-regulation (Gaia), it is no longer possible to fully identify with "humanity" as a distinctive ontological category set apart from all else. Being-in-common can no longer be thought or felt as a community of *humans*; it must become a *community of living beings*. What does this mean for a concept of the "community economy"? Does this mean that the community economy, as a process of ethical deliberation, must be thought as a space of negotiation between and among beings, human and nonhuman? Gibson-Graham and Roelvink suggest this direction in recent work on "an economic ethics for the anthropocene" (2010). Is economy, then, simply a synonym for *ecology*? Or does "economy" somehow resist expansion into the domain of the nonhuman and retain a unique performative role in assembling *human* collectives?

One might argue that economy should be distinguished as a specifically "human" activity by the nature of human symbolic representation and all that arises from it.<sup>66</sup> Is Gibson-Graham's community economy not distinguished from ecology, in the final analysis, by the fact that it is an *ethical process*? And is ethics not a specifically *human* endeavor? Could we not, then, define economy as a symbolically-mediated web of relationships and institutions through which humans, specifically and uniquely, generate livelihoods? Perhaps; but should we? On what grounds are we to say that ethics is the sole domain of humanity? By Maturana and Varela's account of the autopoietic nature of life (Maturana and Varela 1980; Varela 1992), ethics appears as an emergent property of

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<sup>66</sup> What about our advanced technology? Doesn't this make us special? Yes, but as Hird observes, following Margulis and Sagan, bacteria already "invented all major forms of metabolism, multicellularity, nanotechnology, metallurgy, sensory and locomotive apparatuses (such as the wheel), reproductive strategies and community organization, light detection, alcohol, gas and mineral conversion, hypersex and death" (2008, 739).



cognition and may not at all be unique to humans (see also Varela 1999). Who are we to say that other beings have no processes of ethical engagement, relationship or deliberation?<sup>67</sup> And what kind of politics would such a claim--even if we could mobilize many allies to its stabilization--generate and inspire?

Human economies are, of course, particularly complicated by the nature of our symbolic representations and the great emphasis placed on generational learning through live transmission of knowledge. This makes us unique, but unless we choose to constitute our difference as an ontological divide (a choice that I, for one, am not willing to make) between us and all other beings, it does not make us wholly *distinct*. Symbolic representation, as work in the field of biosemiotics is now showing, is a property of *life itself* (Hoffmeyer 1996; 1997; 2008; Wheeler 2006); human semiotics are a complex and interesting manifestation of meaning-making activity in which all beings engage. It is our particular ability to externalize the symbolic process in forms that can jump time and space--thus creating a kind of abstraction rare (though maybe not entirely absent) in other species--that is *unique* (Margulis and Sagan 2007). All of this suggests an approach to community economy fully inclusive of all living beings who participate in constituting their own livelihoods in relation to one another and to their non-living contexts (who, as Latour reminds us, are *also* actants).<sup>68</sup>

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67 Roelvink and Gibson-Graham propose, in fact, that their "post-humanist" conception of a community economy, "displaces humans as the sole agents of ethical decision-making" (2009, 149).

68 Another way to make this point: there is no more ground for the construction of a human "economy" as distinct from its ecological context than there would be for ecologists to consider the social provisioning practices of bees a wholly-separate "system"--with independent "laws" and "imperatives"—from their constitutive interrelationships with flowering plants, other pollinators, soil mycorrhizae and nitrogen-fixing bacteria, and seed-dispersing birds and mammals. Indeed, the actual difference between those who *have* economy and those who *don't* is actualization by some humans of the symbolic capacity to *represent* ourselves as constituting a distinct sphere of existence. In other words, we are separated only by virtue of our ability to conceive of this separation and then to (partially and unsuccessfully) enact it.

What, then, is the difference between economy and ecology? As Odum and Barrett state in their well-known textbook, *Fundamentals of Ecology*:

The word ecology is derived from the Greek *oikos*, meaning "household," and *logos*, meaning "study." Thus, the study of the environmental house includes all the organisms in it and all the functional processes that make the house habitable. Literally, then, ecology is the study of "life at home" with emphasis on "the totality or pattern of relations between organisms and their environment" (2004, 2).

The word economy, as is widely known, is derived from precisely the same root (*oikos*), but with its suffix placing an emphasis on the *nomos*, the "distribution" or "management" (OED 2010). Thus (suspending, for a moment, our performative ontological perspective) ecology and economy could be said to share the same "object," but from different standpoints. Both focus, we might say, on the constitutive interrelationships that characterize our being-in-common, but one *studies* and the other *manages*.

De-linking our thought from the hierarchical implications that might be derived from a notion of "management," I believe that etymology can guide us in clarifying a notion of the community economy. What is distinct (from ecology) in Gibson-Graham's formulation of economy is not (as we may have previously suspected) the *ethical per se*, but rather the centering of *participation*. Economy, as a process of constituting livelihoods in/as community, is ecology but *as seen from the inside*, from "on the ground," so to speak. Ecology, on the other hand, is what Latour calls a "panorama," a project of articulation that represents a whole, as if from above, in order to trace a wide array of connections all at once.<sup>69</sup> Never to be mistaken for the actual "whole" (an

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<sup>69</sup> Latour describes: "Contrary to oligoptica, panoramas, as etymology suggests, see everything. But they also see nothing since they simply show an image painted (or projected) on the tiny wall of a room fully closed to the outside. The metaphor comes from those early rooms invented in the early 19th century, whose descendants can be found in the Omnimax cinema rooms built near science centers and shopping malls.<sup>249</sup> The Greek word *pan*, which means 'everything', does not signify that those pictures survey

impossible entity), discourses such as ecology construct images of wholeness in order to offer a unique (and, ironically, partial, local, situated) perspective on a world's complex networks of interrelations.<sup>70</sup> Latour elaborates:

The status of these panoramas is strangely ambiguous: they are simultaneously what vaccinates against totalization—since they are obviously local and constricted inside blind rooms—and what offers a foretaste for the one world to be lived in. They collect, they frame, they rank, they order, they organize; they are the source of what is meant by a well-ordered zoom. So, no matter how much they trick us, they prepare us for the political task ahead. Through their many clever special effects, they offer a preview of the collective with which they should not be confused (2005, 189).

We can begin to see, now, that the distinguishing feature of economy--the community economy--is that it is *not* (and should not be) a top-down view, a fabricated totality-- this is *ecology's* job. It is, instead, a *view from below*, or from the *inside*, from the standpoint of actors constituting community and producing livelihoods together. Livelihoods, in the frame of community economy, are networks of relationships stretching outward from a collective of active subjects making meaning and producing themselves (and their worlds). Economics, quite unlike ecology, should trace these networks *from the perspective of those producing them*. The work of engaging in the construction of an economy is the work of engaging in the democratic production of interrelationship, "the praxis of co-existence and interdependence" (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009, 147) *as a specific community of beings*.

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'the whole' but that, on the contrary, they paper over a wall in a blind room on which a completely coherent scenery is being projected on a 360° circular screen. Full coherence is their forte—and their main frailty" (2005, 187).

70 Ecology, according to E.O. Wilson, "was and remains a study of holism and emergence, of the properties of life taken from the top down" (2004)

This is wild terrain to find ourselves in: such an attempt to (quite presumptuously) reconfigure economy and ecology suggests a whole host of pathways for thought and exploration. It implies, for example, that all communities or populations,<sup>71</sup> human and nonhuman, make and share (negotiate, struggle over) *economies*. Honeybee economies, deer economies, vernal pool economies, human economies of Greenville, Maine-- all are just as legitimately "economic" as the other. Yet at the same time, it does not necessarily imply an abandonment of categories that (some) humans have used to organize our livelihoods; on the contrary, as a situated practice, economics should take the concepts that we produce (and then, in turn, use to produce ourselves) quite *seriously* as sites of struggle and performance. These sites--and the worlds that they help to bring into being-- cannot, however, be understood as somehow ontologically distinct from the sites produced by other communities and other beings. We co-inhabit and co-create our worlds in the context of other people, other beings, co-inhabiting and co-creating theirs. Economy is the active *site of meeting* between these world-making efforts. We meet in these places with ethics, with values, and the livelihoods we make depend on the ethical negotiations in which we engage.

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71 It would be useful, in another project, to explore the distinction between "community" and "population" in this context more carefully. In ecology, "community" implies multiple species co-inhabiting the same space at the same time, while "population" most often refers to groups of the same *species* in the same place and time. More nuanced geographical understandings of place and space might lead us to reconsider what is meant by "same place and time" (Massey 2005), while the distinction between heterogeneous groupings of species and single populations might generate very different ways of approaching the question of economy: should we take communities or populations as our focus? What would the effects of such choices be?

### *Making Livelihoods Together*

By way of moving toward a conclusion to this section of the chapter, I want to return to Polanyi. We have seen how Gibson-Graham share the spirit of Polanyi's substantive and process-focused approach, opening up the terrain of economic ontology with their concept of community economy. No longer a structured system, a distinct ontological domain, or a restricted (formalist) sphere of singular (or even narrowly plural) rationalities or logics, the economy appears as a collective process of ethical negotiation, a site of complex interdependence where the question of "how should we live together" is placed at the fore. Given such a robust and enticing conceptualization, might Gibson-Graham and her collaborators have something to learn (or at least to draw on) from Elder Polanyi (the "other Karl")? If there is such a thing, I suggest that it lies in Polanyi's notion of "institution."

Gibson-Graham's notion of community economy offers us a framework within which to see various processes of ethical negotiation within a given collectivity or community. But negotiations and struggles over livelihood are often (like other materialized performances) covered over by their repetition. It is not enough to view economy as a process of constituting our interdependence, or even to make visible the various coordinates around which we engage in such constituting action (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 88)<sup>72</sup>; we must also engage the ways in which negotiations become solidified, stabilized and thus (often) closed through processes of subjectification, habit-formation,

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<sup>72</sup> Gibson-Graham identifies four "coordinates" for understanding and engaging the dynamics of ethical negotiation: they propose that we examine economic relationships in terms of how a *commons* "is produced and sustained...how products and surplus are to be *consumed*...what is *necessary* to personal, social and ecological survival...[and] how *surplus* is appropriated from and distributed to humans and the more than human" (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010, 331).

and institutionalization. Polanyi's notion of "the economy...as an instituted process" (1992, 33) is of great value here. "The substantive economy," suggests Polanyi, "must be understood as being constituted on two levels: one is the interaction between man and his surroundings; the other is the institutionalization of that process" (1977, 31). We can see, through this framework of instituting action (note Polanyi's emphasis on the *verb* rather than *noun* form), ways in which livelihood construction is solidified into certain patterns and structures that persist over time, that have a certain durability.

As I described in Chapter 2, both ways of seeing are crucial: we must have tools to simultaneously understand the ways in which the active construction of interrelationship is captured and channeled into particular, relatively-stable institutional forms, and we must be able to understand these forms as produced, as in need of continual performance, and as perpetually-open sites of ethical negotiation and struggle. Such a dual view, I believe, allows us to situate Gibson-Graham's diverse economies framework (which we shall encounter in detail below) more solidly in relation to her conception of the community economy: the diverse economies grid (Figure 10) is a description of institutionalized patterns of relationship that have emerged out of ongoing historical struggles to materialize livelihoods. They do not describe all possible forms of relation, but they do describe general forms that are common to many contemporary societies. Polanyi's scheme does similar work, albeit (as we shall see) in a more structured (perhaps *too* structured) and narrowly-focused way. All such frameworks are at once powerful and dangerous: in describing the range of patterns that have emerged within a given community's livelihood-construction process, they enable us to see certain

hegemonic structures (the market, for example) as only one among other institutional options; in describing these patterns, however, they also help to consolidate them and may risk foreclosing the possibility of constructing institutions that *do not yet exist* in any form. Our work of economic development must be vigilant in navigating between these possibilities and challenges

To summarize our journey thus far in the realm of alternative economic ontology, we have seen that economy can be usefully conceptualized in the following ways:

- First, as a powerful nodal point of articulation, a widely-recognized and highly-regarded project of linking together diverse activities into a performative web of relationships. Here, we have crucial ethical-political choices to make when it comes to the specific ontological content of our economic performances.
- Second, and moving into the project of performance itself, we can view the economy not as a unified system or a domain of being but as a *process of constituting livelihoods*. This process is not restricted to any one particular form of institution or rationality but takes, rather, myriad forms.
- Third, and more specifically, this process can be understood as a manifestation of the fundamental *relationality of being* and, as such, a process of negotiating the nature of our interdependencies in community.
- Fourth, economy and ecology can be seen to name the same set of interrelationships, but from very different perspectives. While ecology takes a

big-picture "panoramic" view (as if from the outside), economy takes a view from the "inside," from the perspective of active participants constructing livelihoods in relation to each other and the other beings and communities in the world.

- Fifth, the process of economy is one in which all living beings participate, and economy can be understood as a frame through which to examine and engage with the specific ways in which a given group or community struggle to enact particular livelihood relationships
- Sixth, and finally, processes of economic constitution are often structured into durable patterns of relationship--also always plural--that can be recognized as such and either fostered or challenged depending on the ways in which they succeed or fail (or both) at performing a community's ethical aspirations. It is a key part of the work of transformation-oriented economists (in the broad sense of all who produce systematic discourses about economy) to help identify these institutions as both spaces of possibility and points of struggle.

We can turn, now, to a series of more detailed inquiries regarding some of the ways that theorists have conceptualized patterns (or institutions) of economic relationship, particularly among human communities.



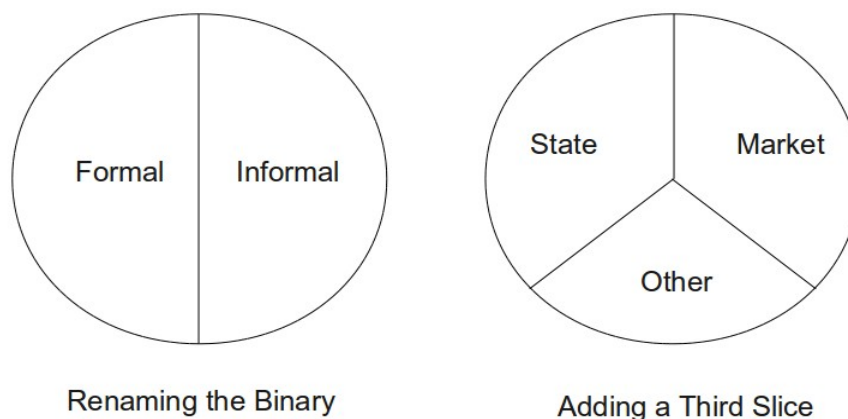
## **Patterns of Economy**

This section of the chapter takes the place of what, in Chapter 1, was an exploration of "the structure of economy." We can no longer talk, however, of an economy's structure as if it were a thing to be broken down into parts or a system whose components and functions can be delineated and dissected. The shift in our theorization of economy from *domain* to *relational process* signifies a different direction for conceptualizing the ways in which the dynamics of livelihood creation crystallize, in different communities, into patterns. This is a challenging move, not the least because we have been subjected for so long to systemic habits of thought that call forth structural images and concepts. We must note, at the outset, some of the traps into which we might fall. These come in at least two forms: that of the reconstituted binary and that of the "three spheres" (Figure 2). I will briefly look at each in turn.

Binary thought is a habit that is hard to break. Even with a critique of the simple division between market and state in hand, we might be tempted to reformulate the structure of economy in terms of another (seemingly more useful or liberating) binary. A fairly common example of this move is embodied in the formal/informal distinction (see, for example, Nicholls and Dyson 1983; Ross and Usher 1986). Recognizing many of the ways in which the diversity of livelihood activities has been excluded from conventional, market-centered and monetized economic frameworks, some development practitioners and activists have drawn on a framework first formulated by anthropologist Keith Hart (1973) in the context of his studies on urban unemployment in Ghana. For Hart, "informal" referred to economic relationships that are not structured by a "regularity of

order, a predictable rhythm and sense of control" (2007, 21) . The concept has since been taken to variously refer to all non-monetized relations, illegal activities, unregulated and unreported exchanges, or simply the economies of all people who don't have "regular" jobs (Hart 2007; Schneider 2004).

The problem with this framework is twofold. First, and quite specifically, its use of the language of formality leads to the reproduction of assumptions that governments and firms are characterized primarily by the regularity of their operation (occluding the ways in which these institutions are irregular, inconsistent, and unpredictable) and that non-firm, non-government, community- or family-based activities are irregular and non-structured. This is a manifestation of the broader problem: as with most binaries, even the best intentioned use of the formal/informal distinction works to perform a hierarchical structure of thought and practice in which the "informal" is likely to appear as the inferior, weaker and eternally-dependent "other" of the formal economy. The attempt to visibilize certain forms of livelihood production through the formal/informal concept leads easily to the ongoing marginalization of this very activity.



**Figure 2: Two Structural Approaches to Rethinking Economy.**

A second, and perhaps more common, approach to rethinking the market/state structure of conventional economic ontology is to conceptualize the economy as constituted by three "sectors" or "spheres." Like the market/state conception, this economic ontology presumes a space that can be divided into parts. The innovation is to claim that there are not just *two* but *three* such parts. This is the "market/state/other" ontology, with the third add-on ("other") sphere marking a kind of fill-in-the-blank space that various alternative economy theorists claim as their own. For some, this domain is simply a catch-all "third sector," the "set of activities that can be captured by neither the price mechanism nor by governmental transactions" (Adaman and Madra 2002, 1045).<sup>73</sup>; for others, it is more specific: the "social economy" sector (Pearce 2003); the "non-profit" sector (Salamon and Anheier 1992); the domain of "reciprocity" (Laville 1996a)<sup>74</sup>; the domain of "households" (Evers 1996); or the "relational pole"-- the domain of labor and "community ownership" (Nyssens 1996)

The market/state/other ontology suffers from a number of fundamental flaws or dangers. First, it maintains the problematic distinction between market and state. This conceptualization alone serves to obscure both the differences that are internalized by these two categories and the many ways in which they are overlapping, crisscrossed and mutually-constitutive. Such a representation may render invisible, for example, the role

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73 For Adaman and Madra, this includes "inter alia, voluntary contributions to charities, services donated to self-help organizations, gifts and counter-gifts, inheritance, domestic work, childcare, and intra-community support networks" (2002, 1045).

74 "To transcend the dilemmas arising from today's socio-economic transformations it is necessary to break loose from the conceptual framework in which the economy is identified exclusively with the principles of market forces and institutionalized redistribution as it was conceived in the nineteenth century. Indeed, this restrictive view masks the persistence in the modern economy of a third mode of exchange, reciprocity" (Laville 1996, 47).

of governance and policy in forming and sustaining the legal and political conditions that *make* "the market" as well as, in some cases, the elements of that mysterious third sphere.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, markets are constituted by forms of governance and states are engaged in forms of monetized, market-based transaction. No clear ontological line can be said to separate the two, and their analytical value as categories in this regard is questionable.

A second key flaw lies in the construction of the "third sector" as a sphere that captures all that is not captured by "the market" and "the state." On what grounds can such a domain be defended? Given the diversity of claims made over this third slice of economic pie, who is to decide which of the contending "thirds" should claim their rightful place among the trinity? The very question, in fact, reveals the absurdity of the discourse: why in the world would we decide that there must be *three*? Why not four, five, or fifteen? Even if such a question were answerable, we are left with the risk that such a representation obscures the strength, importance and pervasiveness of these "third" economic activities and renders them susceptible to becoming mere accessories-- whether seen as a band-aid, a necessary supplement, or a marginal radical alternative waiting in the wings (Hadjimichalis and Hudson 2007). How, in such a conception, do we avoid tacitly reproducing a model of subordination where, like a "third wheel," this "third sector" is conceptualized as supplemental, marginal and ultimately subordinate to the other two (read as more powerful) sectors. Indeed, what makes it "*third*"?<sup>76</sup>

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75 Another danger with separating out "the state" is the sense in which that state can also be seen as a requirement generated by an expanding market. This is Polanyi's "double movement" in which the state emerges as both an enabler of the market and as an institution of social defense against it. If a "social welfare state" emerged as a large-scale bureaucratic force in the mid 20th century, it is in part because an increasingly powerful market continually eclipsed and eroded the abilities of communities to provide for themselves. The "Big State," then, can be seen as a product of the "Big Market" (Laville 1996).

76 Where, additionally, is the *earth* located in such a scheme? The three spheres model leaves ecological

Finally, the very conception of "spheres" is itself implicated in the performance of economy a distinctive and autonomous ontological domain. We must heed Mitchell's warning that "the discursive practices that appear to separate the economy from the state should be grasped not as signs marking the border between two spheres but as powerful organizing practices that create the material effects of the economy as an apparently self-contained structure" (Mitchell 1998, 92). Are the discursive practices marking border between three spheres implicated in the same project? While not certain, this is a distinct danger. A "third sphere" is all-too-compatible with a systemic, structured notion of an economic totality. To move beyond this kind of ontology, we need to free the beings and relationships captured by the notion of "spheres" and "sectors" and allow them to flourish as diverse elements of dynamic relational processes through which communities build and struggle over livelihoods.

Structural binaries and trinities are *easy to think*--ringing "true" somehow with patterns performed by hegemonic economic discourses--yet they offer very little in the way of possibilities for enacting substantively different economic relationships. Both the alternative binary approach and the market/state/other approach reproduce precisely the economic ontology that has contributed to generating the problems that they seek to address. But how are we to think differently? What kinds of concepts can animate an economic ontology focused on relational processes instead of static structures or spheres?

For some possibilities, I turn now to a series of explorations of the economic

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interrelations out of the economic picture entirely. I cannot help but see the parallels here between the conceptualization of the "three sectors" and the "three worlds" of contemporary geopolitical analysis: first world=market; second world=state; third world="third sector/informal economy". This leaves out what many indigenous activists have called "the fourth world"--a world in which the constitutive interrelations between human cultures and living places and nonhuman beings are rendered visible and important.

theorizations of Polanyi, Gudeman, and Gibson-Graham. No set of ideas captures all dimensions of economic life; each set of theorizations has rich elements to offer us in the work of assembling a toolkit for economic action and imagination. I will attempt to sift and sort, distilling what wisdom I can as a contribution to future work.

### *Polanyi's Forms of Motion and Integration*

Karl Polanyi's work on patterns of economic relationship appears to be a kind of "obligatory point of passage" (Harman 2009, 51) for alternative theorizations of economy. There is, indeed, something compelling and attractive about his clean, almost geometrical framework, framed as a multi-layered set of *movements* and *forms of integration*. Do these concepts have something to offer us in developing a toolbox for enabling ethical economic thought and action? I suggest a qualified yes, with enthusiasm for the questions raised by Polanyi's approach and some degree of uncertainty with regard to its usefulness as a concrete basis for participatory projects of regional development. Regardless, these ideas are worth exploring.

Polanyi's emphasis on process over static structure generates a set of concepts based on dynamic patterns of movement. "Process," he writes, "suggests analysis in terms of motion" (1992, 33). This motion is understood on two primary levels: first, in terms of the nature of the movement itself and second in terms of the institutional patterns in which this motion is manifest. On the first level (that of the nature of motion), Polanyi distinguishes two fundamental processes: *locational* and *appropriational* movements. Taken together, he says quite boldly, they "may be said to exhaust the possibilities

comprised in the economic process as a natural and social phenomenon" (Polanyi 1992, 33). *Locational movements* are "changes of place," the geographies of things as they move from one location to another (Polanyi 1977, 31). When a physical dollar changes hands, when a log is transported by truck to a mill, when a loaf of bread is carried home from the store, locational movements --always concrete and traceable-- have taken place. This form of motion, for Polanyi, includes production, "alongside of transportation, to which the spatial shifting of objects is equally essential" (1992, 33). Always accompanying locational movements are *appropriational movements* or "changes of hands." These involve not a tracing of the physical motion of an object, but rather its movement through a social and political chain of claims over its ownership and control. Appropriational movements "govern...what is usually referred to as the circulation of goods and their administration" (Polanyi 1992, 33). Thus appropriation can either involve *transaction*--"an appropriative movement as between hands" (1992, 33) or *disposition*--"a one-sided act of the hand, to which by force of custom or law definite appropriative effects are attached" (1992, 33). In other words, "either the person (or persons) at whose disposal things are, or the extent to which they have rights of disposal over them, changes" (Polanyi 1977, 31).

This two-fold scheme of motion might be helpful in a few ways. Analysis of locational movements can help us to ask questions about the social and ecological dynamics of spatiality. Where are things produced, where do they then go, and what are the consequences of these movements?: does it stay on the farm? In the household? In the town? In the region? In ways does this matter? Does it travel far? Where does it go and

how does it get there? Does it get assembled with lots of other stuff and then redistributed? What are the impacts of all of these choices? Examining appropriational movements can also give rise to useful questions, perhaps most importantly: who has control over the production, use and disposal of a thing (or a place, a life, etc.)? If we think of appropriation as a description of property, and property as a "right to action" (Hyde 2010), then appropriational movements can be understood as transfers of the rights to *do* things, of *powers to act*. Both sets of movements, as analytical categories, can help open up dynamics of livelihood construction for ethical questioning.

I am, however, being somewhat charitable. How useful are these categories, really, and how comprehensive? While locational movements, I believe, *are* useful to examine, particularly in the face of a hegemonic economic paradigm that often views economic activity playing out in a non-located, aspatial context, in what Perroux specifically called "abstract economic space" (Perroux 1950), appropriational movements are more conceptually problematic. Most generally, it not clear how the condensation of all dimensions of power in relation to economic processes can be usefully accomplished through the use of a single concept. What is subsumed within "appropriation" by Polanyi is, in fact, a whole set of complex and crucially distinct processes and relations. Property, for one, is a disputable claim, and multiple claims may exist over the same object<sup>77</sup>; property and control, moreover, are not always coextensive, as in the situation of a corporation owned by stockholders but effectively controlled by hired managers<sup>78</sup>; and

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<sup>77</sup> I can't help but cite here Proudhon's delightfully provocative assertion that "property is theft."

<sup>78</sup> To elaborate this example further: Ownership is legally in the hands of stockholders, control is effectively in the hands of managers, and use of the means of production has been granted to workers on the condition that they subject themselves to management and give up their right to surplus appropriation. The surplus, in turn, is technically owned by the stockholders, but its distribution is



neither are property and the right to *use* always the same. A library, for example, embodies a relationship in which the ownership of items remains static while both their locations and *use* rights constantly change.<sup>79</sup> It appears that Polanyi's concepts of motion are, at worst, too general to be usefully applied as tools for ethical negotiation and, at best, in dire need of further specification to *become* such useful tools.

The second set of concepts mobilized by Polanyi may offer a bit more to our project. Examining not the actual motion itself, but the *institutionalized patterns of organization* into which these movements tend to coalesce, Polanyi named a set of patterns-- the "forms of integration"-- that appear to capture a wide range of structured relations with a small number of general categories. The "unity and stability" of an economy, he suggests, "is achieved through a combination of very few patterns which may be called forms of integration" (1992, 35). Integration is, in a sense, the process of consolidating and linking manifestations of the two forms of movement into specific, repeated and continually-reproduced forms of relation: "integration is present in the economic process to the extent that those movements of goods and persons which overcome the effect of space, time, and occupational differentials are institutionalized so

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controlled by a combination of managers, a tax-demanding state, and various other forces requiring external payment. Its actual distribution (and, ultimately, the apportioned distribution of its control) is spread out among many parties, only some of whom are the actual legal owners (and, often, very few of whom are the actual producers). In what sense, then, does "appropriational movement" help us to understand these dynamics?

79 There is also an entire dimension of economic process that is missing from Polanyi's movements, that which I would call *transformational movements*. While Halperin attempts to save Polanyi by claiming that locational movements include not only spatial changes but "physical changes" and "energetic transfers" (Halperin 1994, 59), I find this to be quite a stretch. Unless we conceptualize molecular rearrangements as simply a form of "location change," then Polanyi's framework appears to miss the entire realm of economic processes in which things are transformed from one form to another, combined with other things, and thus "produced" as specifically useful objects. It may be that Polanyi's focus on the realm of circulation and exchange, as opposed to a focus on forces and relations of production (as, for example, in Marx), led to such an omission.

as to create interdependence among movements" (Polanyi 1977, 35).<sup>80</sup> Polanyi conceptualizes these forms of integration in an almost geometrical manner: "One might think of the forms of integration as diagrams representing the patterns made by the movements of goods and persons in the economy, whether these movements consist of changes in their location, in their appropriation, or in both" (1977, 36).<sup>81</sup> These forms can and do--and this point is crucial--*co-exist* in any given context; they are not exclusive, and there is no necessity that one should prevail.<sup>82</sup> The four primary ways in which economic processes are instituted, asserts Polanyi, are in the forms of *reciprocity*, *exchange*, *redistribution* and *householding*. They can be described as follows:

- *Reciprocity* is understood as a symmetrical form of transfer, in which both locational and appropriational movements ultimately "go both ways" between parties even if this balance is not achieved in a direct relation of exchange (but is, rather, circular). As Hunt explains, "reciprocity involves exchange of goods between people who are bound in non-market, non-hierarchical relationships with

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80 By "instituted," Polanyi means this: "The instituting of the economic process vests that process with unity and stability; it produces a structure with a definite function in society; it shifts the place of the process in society, thus adding significance to its history; it centers interest on values, motives and policy" (Polanyi 1992, 34).

81 Schaniel and Neale suggest that "the forms of integration be viewed as ways to map the flow of material means through a society" (2000, 89).

82 This is an important (and debated) point. On one hand, Polanyi does assert that a given form of integration might be dominant in a particular society, and this "dominance of a form of integration is here identified with the degree to which it comprises land and labor in society" (1992, 39). He is also clear, however, that "forms of integration do not represent 'stages' of development. No sequence in time is implied. Several subordinate forms may be present alongside of the dominant one, which may itself recur after a temporary eclipse" (1992, 39). Furthermore, "since they occur side by side on different levels and in different sectors of the economy it may often be impossible to select one of them as dominant so that they could be employed for a classification of empirical economies as a whole" (1992, 35). Here Polanyi is recognizing the "endless variations" (1992, 35) that can accompany economic formations and the ways in which many (diverse) economies exist side-by-side, at once, in the same social context. I choose to side with this second, more heterogeneous, Polanyi.

one another" (2002, 106). There is a notion and pattern of equity-- or at least balance-- here, in which economic relations are "premised on a background symmetrically arranged groupings" (Polanyi 1992, 35). Examples of reciprocity include gifting (assuming an indirect or delayed return), barter, and other forms of direct trading between relatively equal partners or groups.

- *Exchange* might appear, for some, as a subset of reciprocity; for Polanyi, however, it is distinct. While it also involves two-way locational and appropriational changes, it is characterized by the mediation of *markets*. "Exchange," for Polanyi, "refers here to vice-versa movements taking place as between 'hands' under a market system" (1992, 35). Trade, in this form of integration, is structured through a system of price-making and, presumably, an accompanying use of symbolic equivalents with which to measure "price." The key element here is that those people or groups involved in exchange are not necessarily involved with *each other*. Their relationships are mediated, instead, through the market structure. "Price-making markets are integrative," says Polanyi, "only if they are linked up in a system which tends to spread the effect of prices to markets other than those directly affected" (1992, 38).
- *Redistribution* also involves a mediating structure, but instead of a market we find a central authority. While this can take many forms (a chief, a state, a "head of the household," a coordinating group, etc.), in all cases "redistribution is dependent upon the presence of some measure of centrality in the group" (Polanyi 1992, 35).

Here, goods move into a center (both locationally and appropriationally) and out of it again.<sup>83</sup>

- *Householding*, finally, returns us to the domain of non-externalized institutional control or authority. It is the form of integration in which it can be said that no real transfer occurs at all: the process by which people and groups produce for their own use and under their own self-direction. As Stodder describes in more detail, "householding is largely autarchical production, with exchange between households carried out only insofar as necessary to dispose of surpluses and fulfill basic needs, rather than profit... exchange appears as a concentric series of self-contained *cycles* of provisioning and eventual restocking" (2002, 32).<sup>84</sup>

Polanyi's forms of integration cannot be understood without two clarifications. First, they should not be confused with what he calls "personal attitudes" (1977, 36-37); they are not value systems adopted by individuals, and nor are they necessarily located in *individuality* at all. As he points out, "redistribution is not an individual pattern of behavior... it depend[s] on the prior existence of a recognized center" (1977, 37). While this is, in some sense, a direct response by Polanyi to the atomistic individualism of formalist economics, it is also an attempt to clarify the sense in which human behavior is

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83 Polanyi specifies redistribution: "Sometimes it amounts to physical collecting accompanied by storage-cum-redistribution, at other times the 'collecting' is not physical, but merely appropriational, i.e., the rights of disposal in the physical location of the goods" (1992, 37).

84 As Gregory (2009) points out, Polanyi appeared to have been ambivalent about including "householding" as one of the forms of integration. It appeared in *The Great Transformation* (1944), but by the publication of *Trade and Markets In the Early Empires* (1957) was absent from Polanyi's framework. This may be, in part, because the concept does not lend itself well to geometrical thinking and is thus the "oddball" of the four categories. Halperin (1994) has defended the concept and used it extensively in her work on economic processes in rural Kentucky (Halperin 1990). I choose follow her in this reading of Polanyi.

institutionalized in such ways as to generate stabilities that no longer wholly depend on the actions, choices or rationalities of individual people.<sup>85</sup> Even a reality whose constitution was initiated by individual human discourses and struggles may mobilize enough allies (human and non) to become a self-perpetuating stability over time. The forms of integration name precisely these kinds of stabilizations rendered in pattern form. In order for these patterns to persist, of course, their stability must be sustained by *other* patterns, *other* discourses and *other* configurations of actors in a given context. One stabilization of actants cannot exist without others.

This is Polanyi's second clarification: the forms of integration require (and are thus somewhat distinct from) "supporting structures" (Polanyi 1977, 37). In order for integration to be produced and sustained, other structures, processes and stabilized relationships in a given social context are necessary. This concept is the very crux of Polanyi's historical analysis in *The Great Transformation*: an integrative pattern of market exchange did not simply appear on the scene in Europe due to a "propensity to truck, barter and trade" (Adam Smith, quoted in Polanyi 1977, 37) or because of an increasing proliferation of repetitive "random actions of exchange" (Polanyi 1977, 37); rather, it was built, painstakingly, with much struggle and suffering, and at great costs through the construction of institutions that *supported and sustained this very integration*. Thus Polanyi's notion of the forms of integration also calls forth a set of questions regarding the accompanying institutions that are (or might be) necessary to produce them.

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<sup>85</sup> Polanyi's elaboration is helpful here: "The effective functioning of forms of integration depends upon the presence of definite institutional structures, and it has long been tempting for some to assume that such structures are the result of certain kinds of personal attitudes. Adam Smith's 'propensity to truck, barter and exchange' is perhaps the most famous example. *It is not true, however, that individual acts and attitudes simply add up to create the institutional structures that support the forms of integration*" (1977, 37 italics mine)

We have, then, from Polanyi, a neatly structured picture of economic processes (Figure 3). The two types of movement are structured into the integrated patterns of reciprocity, exchange, redistribution and/or householding via supporting structures that are at once produced (at least in part) by and work to reproduce (institutionalize) these very patterns. This big-picture view allows us to return to the original questions at hand: what, in this framework, are we able to see that might aid us in imagining and producing

Types of Movement	Forms of Integration	Supporting Structures (examples)
Locational Movements	Reciprocity	Symmetrical groupings Social structures of ritualized encounter between groups Supporting production relations and processes
	Exchange	Shared (symbolic) mediating currencies Price-making markets Property institutions and enforcement structures
Appropriational Movements	Redistribution	Centralized authority (coercive, traditional, delegated, etc.) Transportation and storage management structures Social patterns of centric reciprocity (welfare, entitlements, etc.)
	Householding	Kinship institutions Household governance traditions Internal divisions of labor

**Figure 3: Polanyi's Structure of Economic Process.**

other economic relations? In what ways does it help to render economic options and points of decision visible? In what ways (if at all) does this framework help to perform into being conceptions of economy that render interdependence more apparent, that open up livelihood processes as spaces of ethical negotiation and struggle (rather than logics and necessities)? In what ways does this framework articulate and mobilize human and

nonhuman actants so as to deliver a strategic "strong performance"? In part because they were developed as theories for explanation and cross-cultural analysis of economic institutionalization rather than as tools for alternative economic development or democratic planning, a bit of work is required to draw out the useful dimensions of these tools for participatory development processes. I can only begin to outline the general contours of such a project here.

First, the three movements. Though they don't come with pre-packaged questions, the "movements" (locational, appropriational, and, as I have added, transformational) might enable us to make specific inquiries about the ethical-relational effects of various choices: As noted earlier, examining locational movements might allow us to ask questions about the effects of producing *here* rather than *there*, of transporting something in *this* way rather than *that* way, all the while attentive to the ethical issues at stake in these questions. *How do things move (physically) in our economies and what is at stake in these patterns of movement? What choices do we have (or should we have) in regard to these movements?* Examining appropriational movements would require a more robust differentiation within these dynamics to tease out, for example, the differences between ownership, control and use. With such an elaboration, this framing might facilitate a general questioning at every moment in the process of constituting livelihoods regarding dynamics of agency and power. *Who is able to exercise power with regard to the shaping of a given economic process or relationship, and what forms does this power take? How, and to whom, are various capacities to act, to make decisions, and to shape economic processes transferred, shared or contained?* Adding transformational movements to

Polanyi's framework (see footnote 80) might allow us to ask questions about the nature of production processes and the various agents involved, including nonhumans (photosynthesizers, for example). *How are things transformed from one form to another? Who does this work and how is their work organized? What processes are used in this work and what are the effects of these processes?* And finally, we can ask about the relationships between these processes. *What kinds of patterns do we encounter when we examine the intersections of the three movements? Do certain kinds of locational movements or transformational movements appear to be linked with certain kinds of appropriational movements (not to theorize a necessity, but to notice a performed pattern)? Who exercises power, and how, in shaping the nature of locational and transformation movements?* Figure 4 summarizes these (and other) questions.

Second, the forms of integration. Polanyi's forms of integration appear as a set of compellingly simple and clear conceptual tools with one primary strength: because they are not understood to be exclusive names of a particular, self-structured economic "whole," the forms of integration offer the possibility of analyzing a given region in terms of a *diversity* of livelihood patterns. This can help to break the discursive hegemony of economistic or capitalocentric approaches, opening up space for already-existing positive practices to become more visible and viable. The problem with the "forms of integration" scheme, however, is that it is far *too* simple. Its focus on patterns of motion, effectively a framework centered on *economic transaction*, renders other economic moments and processes invisible. It is thus difficult in Polanyi's framing to ask robust questions about different patterns in the organization of production, in the organization of use or



consumption, or in the the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus. Additionally, the categories themselves suppress internal difference and render certain forms of transfer nearly invisible. Forms of gifting, for example, in which relationships do not have to be symmetrical, are written out of reciprocity (Hunt 2002, 108). The notion of redistribution as a centric transfer from many to one and back to many erases situations in which centric transfers are unidirectional (Hunt 2002, 107), such as fees extracted by despots or when tax money is usurped to fund private defense contractors. The concept of exchange seems to violate Polanyi's own nuanced understanding of markets, apparently reducing indirect mediated exchanges to the domain of price-making markets and thus invisibilizing the diverse dynamics of actually-existing markets that he writes about elsewhere (Polanyi 1977, 125).<sup>86</sup>

The utility of the forms of integration in identifying economic difference and possibility must, therefore, be clarified and qualified. In the domain of economic transaction--that is, the various processes and relationships of movement that link production and use--the four forms of integration may be useful in naming prominent (though not all) relational patterns that co-exist within a given region. In so doing, these forms of economic diversity can help to open up discussion and visioning with regard to the *transactional sites of struggle* and decision that communities might engage with.

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<sup>86</sup> Polanyi describes, in the *Livelihood of Man*, a rather complex approach to markets. "In the institutional sense," he writes, "the term market does not necessarily assume a supply-demand-price mechanism. It is a conjunction of definite institutional traits, which we will call market elements. They are a site, physically present or available goods, a supply crowd, a demand crowd, custom or law, and equivalencies. Thus a market, in institutional terms, merely postulates an exchange situation...This implies no more than a bare vice-versa movement of goods between 'hands' at rates that may be determined by custom, administration, law, or by the market institution itself" (1977, 125). By asserting that "whenever the market elements combine to form a supply-demand-price mechanism, we speak of price-making markets" (1977, 125).

Where are patterns of reciprocity found in our region? Where are processes of redistribution at work? In what domains does exchange appear most (or least) prominent? Where are householding patterns present? What are the political effects of these differing forms of economic process and how do they relate with one another?

Such inquiries can usefully link with analysis regarding "supporting structures." We are reminded by this notion that "economic alternatives" do not and cannot exist in isolation from a broader ethical and institutional context. What kinds of structures *do* enable and support existing forms of cooperation and solidarity? How do various practices and institutions interface with each other so as to make various forms of ethical action and interrelationship appear viable, desirable and sustainable? What kinds of supportive structures might we need to cultivate in order to support new forms of collective action and livelihood creation? Polanyi's guidance with regard to some of the tendencies in these regards--the importance, for example, of symmetry in reciprocal transactions, or the role of inequity in generating and sustaining (but perhaps also calling forth) redistributive patterns--may also substantially contribute to discussion on local and regional scales regarding the kinds of economic processes and relations that are desired and the forms of institutional support that might be required to sustain them.

<b>Key Questions About Economic Processes</b> (inspired by Polanyi)	
<b>Spatial Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do things move (physically) in our economies and what is at stake in these patterns of movement?</li> <li>• What choices do we have (or should we have) in regard to these movements?</li> </ul>
<b>Power Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is able to exercise power with regard to the shaping of a given economic process or relationship, and what forms does this power take?</li> <li>• How, and to whom, are various capacities to act, to make decisions, and to shape economic processes transferred, shared or contained?</li> </ul>
<b>Processes of Material Transformation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are things transformed from one form to another?</li> <li>• Who does this work and how is their work organized?</li> <li>• What processes are used in this work and what are the effects of these processes?</li> </ul>
<b>Connections Between Space, Power and Materiality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of patterns do we encounter when we examine the intersections of the three movements?</li> <li>• Do certain kinds of locational movements or transformational movements appear to be linked with certain kinds of appropriational movements (not to theorize a necessity, but to notice a performed pattern)?</li> <li>• Who exercises power, and how, in shaping the nature of locational and transformation movements?</li> </ul>
<b>Patterns of Integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the diverse ways in which ethical negotiations crystallize into patterns of economic integration at various moments of economic life?</li> <li>• What kinds of categories might we use to describe these patterns and their (actual and possible) relationships with one another?</li> </ul>
<b>Enabling Structures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of structures do enable and support existing forms of cooperation and solidarity?</li> <li>• How do various practices and institutions interface with each other so as to make various forms of ethical action and interrelationship appear viable, desirable and sustainable?</li> <li>• What kinds of supportive structures might we need to cultivate in order to support new forms of collective action and livelihood creation?</li> </ul>

**Figure 4: Key Economic Questions Enabled by Polanyi's Substantive Approach.**

One of the most powerful and prominent alternative economic discourses to emerge as a strong presence in recent years is that of "the commons." For many seeking pathways beyond the paradigms of conventional economic development, the commons is a language which "provides a coherent alternative model for bringing economic, social and ethical concerns into greater alignment" (Bollier 2006, 2).<sup>87</sup> Yet despite Bollier's additional claim that the commons "is, in fact, a rather simple and obvious concept" (2006, 1), my reading shows instead that it is, in fact, a quite *complex* and *confusing* concept. Writers and activists variously define the commons as a collectively-managed resource pool (Ostrom 1990), sometimes used interchangeably with the term "common pool resources" (Prakash 1998); as a mode of decentralized, democratic production (Siefkes 2008); as the opposite of the capitalist commodity (Bakker 2007; Dyer-Witherford 2010); as the domain of "reciprocity" (Lipietz 2009); as the domain of "public goods" (Anton Anton, Fisk, and Holmström 2000); as all that is made and shared by a community in the process of building and maintaining that community (Gudeman 2001); as a verb-form, "commoning," a process of enacting noncapitalist values; or, finally, as a complex mixture of many of the above.

It is not within the scope of this thesis to attempt a sorting and clarification of these diverse and fascinating versions of the "the commons." Recognizing the power and

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<sup>87</sup> Bollier offers a wonderful description of the utility of a commons discourse, connecting quite well with my earlier theorizations (in Chapter 2) of performativity: "The discourse of the commons is at once descriptive, constitutive and expressive. It is *descriptive* because it identifies models of community governance that would otherwise go unexamined. It is *constitutive* because, by giving us a new language, it helps us to build new communities based on principles of the commons. And it is *expressive* because the language of the commons is a way for people to assert a personal connection to a set of resources and a social solidarity with each other" (2006, 3, italics mine).

potential of some version of this discourse to aid in the process of resignifying economy as a process of collective deliberation about shared livelihoods --particularly at local and regional scales-- I will instead explore the concept of the commons primarily through the work of one theorist of economy, Stephen Gudeman. While I will enlist, along the way, other sympathetic writers and ideas, my focus will be on Gudeman's particular --and, to me, particularly useful-- conceptualization of the commons in the context of his larger theory of the duality of economy. These ideas, I believe, have much to add to our slowly growing toolbox of concepts, questions and maps of the terrain of collective economic deliberation, struggle and creation.

At first glance, Gudeman's theorization of economy should cause alarm bells to ring: it is built on a binary. I have not had nice things to say in this thesis about such constructions, but this particular framework is somewhat different than the binaries we encountered in conventional RED or in the formal/informal division within the economic domain. Not a structural distinction, Gudeman's division is built on the notion --quite resonant in this sense with Gibson-Graham-- of economy as an *engagement of values in the process of constituting livelihoods*. In this framing, he presents his proposition: "Economy contains two value realms: mutuality and markets" (Gudeman 2008, 150). Said differently, "all economies are built on the interacting realms of communal and commercial value" (Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez 2002, 161).<sup>88</sup>

Gudeman thus defines economy as composed of two dialectically-related "value domains." The *market* realm is characterized by "impersonal trade," or "anonymous

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88 In an interesting echo of Polanyi (proclaiming his economic movements to explain all), Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez assert that "in practice, most institutions are mixtures of the two modes, but *they are constructed of just these two*" (2002, 161, italics mine).

competitive interchanges in which market participants exchange or barter goods, labor, money, or ideas" (2008, 4). This is the world of commensurability, where values are reduced to a common (often monetary) measure that enables diverse goods to become exchangeable with one another. The value regime in this market domain, then, is one of *exchange value* and the elevation of instrumental or calculative rationality over other modes of relation.<sup>89</sup> Here, the "self-interest of the unit--whether an individual, family or corporation--is a primary motive and value" (Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez 2002, 161). The second realm, that of *mutuality*, is one in which values of connection, interrelationship and mutual responsibility prevail. Goods are incommensurate (and sometimes incommensurable) as *use values*, with the prime emphasis placed on "the sustenance and reproduction of community and communal ties rather than calculative self-interest" (2002, 161).<sup>90</sup> In this realm, "things and services are secured and allocated...by means of continuing ties...through cooperation...reciprocity...and by self-sufficient activities" (2008, 5).

Crucial to Gudeman's articulation of these dual value processes at work in constituting economies is his clear assertion that market and mutuality do not constitute two structurally-distinct ontological "spheres" of a self-contained economy. These are

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89 Calculative reason, for Gudeman, is defined much like Polanyi's notion of "formalist" economic rationality. "Whatever label is used, this mode of reason has a linear form in which means and ends are linked with the means selected for the ends, or the ends chosen in light of the means, usually according to a standard of maximization or optimization" (2008, 6).

90 Gudeman is explicit in his linkage of the market/mutuality binary to the exchange-value/use-value distinction developed by Aristotle and utilized extensively by Marx. For him, a primary consideration in this distinction is with regard to commensurability: exchange-value is constituted in and through a construction of commensurate value with other (very different) goods and thus involves the reduction of place- and culture- specific social value to a numeric quantity. Use-value, on the other hand, is fundamentally incommensurate since it is constituted only in relation to its qualitative relations in diverse contexts, none of which can be reduced to the other without severing the good from the social context in which its meaning and value is based (Gudeman 2001).

not, in other words, value-based re-writes of the public/private or formal/informal binaries. Gudeman's reference to them as "domains" or "realms" is, in fact, an unfortunate confusion of his own intent: market and mutuality are understood as value regimes, constituted by value practices, that crisscross the fabric of social life.<sup>91</sup> Each of us, for Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez, live a "double economic life" (2002, 178) as our identities, desires and values are multiply situated in and between the two forms of value practice. Market and mutuality are, in a sense, inside each other: "Communities are inside markets, as households, corporations, unions, guilds and oligopolies, and contain them as nation-states that provide a legal structure for contracts and material infrastructure" (Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez 2002, 161). This is "economy's tension" (Gudeman 2008): perhaps represented more effectively as a non-binary yin-yang than as a division between two "domains."

Yet such a balanced representation does not quite get at the nature of the dynamic that Gudeman describes. It is not simply the case that market and mutuality exist, side by side (or inside by inside) as value forces in tension. There is a certain kind of ethical geography at work in Gudeman's conception as well: market values, practices of calculative reason, emerge at the *edges* of community, in relations characterized by a certain kind of social distance. It is *anonymity*, and the kinds of uncertainties, communicative challenges, and gaps of identification that come along with it, that gives rise to the dynamic of commensuration across difference and an elevation of instrumental reason and action over mutual regard. One of Gudeman's most explicit projects is to show

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91 For this reason, I will try to avoid referring to market and mutuality as "realms" or "domains," leaning instead on a reading of Gudeman through the concept of *value practices* (derived from McMurtry 1998; 2002; and De Angelis 2007). I do not think this is a betrayal of his core intentions and, in fact, may serve to clarify his theory.

(much like Polanyi in this regard) that the rational, utility-maximizing "economic man" cannot be generalized as a universal human identity but (and here he departs from Polanyi) must rather be understood as a potential (and, as we well know, often actual) emergent *value process* in the context of trading beyond one's community of identification (2008, 62).<sup>92</sup> To be clear, this dynamic should not be understood as having a necessary spatiality; distance is seen here not as measure of physical proximity, but as a matter of community. The international solidarity embodied in certain kinds of "fair trade" relationships is precisely the *construction of mutuality* which renders unconstrained calculative rationality less appropriate. Gudeman's concept draws on a notion of proximity in which it is *relational* distance that (as, he points out, work in experimental economics has shown) gives rise to a generalized exchange-value process and, accompanying this, a greater tendency toward "opportunistic acts" (2008, 63).

At the *heart* of Gudeman's theorization of economy, then, is mutuality and community. This is the starting point, the center, the conceptual home-base from which all else is seen and understood. Mutuality is "shared language, speech codes, body gestures, rituals and unwritten practices and processes as well as norms, laws, and other social agreements" (Gudeman 2008, 27), the core elements of culture and community. To push this concept beyond the specifically-human, we can say that mutuality is the

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92 Gudeman offers a fascinating account of the possible emergence of contemporary economic discourses about the universality of the rational, calculating Homo economicus that resonates quite well with my discussion of performativity in Chapter 2: "I surmise," he writes, "that the presumption of instrumental rationality as a human universal spread in European culture with the uncertainty produced by the expansion of market trade. Practiced first in bits and pieces in material life, it was attributed to others as to the self in the market, then conceptualized, partly on a philosophical basis, and finally inserted into the center of the discipline of economics. Throughout this evolution, practical ways of doing things were abstracted and voiced, and these formulations influenced what people did in a continuing cycle" (2008, 66-67).



embodied manifestation of our being-in-common with other life, the constitutive sociality that makes us possible, and the set of value practices that emerges in the process of actively participating in this interdependence.<sup>93</sup> For Gudeman, (human) mutuality, in the form of community<sup>94</sup>, is constituted in and through four fundamental elements: a "*base*," a set of "shared materials and services that constitute and sustain the community" (2008, 28); "*narratives of legitimacy*," the shared stories that justify and give content to the sharing of the base; "*cojoint identities*" in which individuals are constituted as *selves* in and through the community and its base-sharing; and, finally, *processes of allocation and allotment*, "processes for sharing the base that are linked to the explanatory narrative" (2008, 27). Through these four interrelated elements, communities constitute themselves as communities and construct their community economies.

It is here that we arrive, finally, at the concept of the *commons*. "A community economy, above all," write Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez, "makes and shares a commons" (2002, 165). What Gudeman calls the *base* in his most recent work he has called "the commons" in previous writings. Despite his own linguistic shift, and with all due respect for his choice, I wish to retain the original term.<sup>95</sup> The commons is a

93 This concept of mutuality is similar to what McMurty terms "the life-code," the "underlying life-organization of society" through which living beings reproduce themselves and their communities. He represents this life-code using an interestingly-transformed version of Marx's diagram of capital accumulation: "We can represent the life-code by a simple formula, expressed in two basic sequences: (1) Life-->Means of Life (e.g., food)-->Life (survival) or L-->M-->L; (2) Life-->Means of Life (e.g., education)-->More Comprehensive Life (i.e., growth of life's range) or L-->M-->L<sup>1</sup>" (1998, 370).

94 "When the interactions of mutuality make up a collectivity of people, I term them 'community.' ...Communities may be embedded within one another or overlap; they can differ in importance, duration, and internal structure; and their borders may be firm or permeable" (Gudeman 2008, 27).

95 Gudeman's shift from "commons" to "base" appears to have been due to the rising prominence of a discourse of the commons that equates it with a specific form of property or with a common-pool natural resource management regime (see Gudeman 2008, 92). His notion of the base is at once much broader and more specific than this, cutting, so to speak, in a different direction. For reasons described above, I prefer to stick with the older term, accepting the work of distinguishing it from its other,

compelling discourse: widely recognized, laden with rich historical weight, evocative of its sister terms (common, community, communication, even --perhaps quite ambiguously-- communism), and it is, above all, *plural*. Indeed, "the commons" is characterized by a wonderful and strange grammatical structure whereby the plural is expressed as singular. We would never talk about "the economies" or "the socials" or even "the cooperatives" as a singular noun; but the *common* becomes, so easily, *the commons*. Is this not the noun form of Nancy's "being singular plural"? It expresses precisely the sense that Gudeman wishes to convey in regard to practices of mutuality: they are always multiple, "always in the making" (Gudeman 2008, 30), irreducible in their specificity to a general formula or singular theorization, incommensurable precisely because of their rootedness in the rich and tangled diversity of people, places and contexts.<sup>96</sup>

Value practices of mutuality, for Gudeman, are always constituted in and through a base or commons. Moving far beyond a view of commons as an objective pool of material resources to be managed or as "something separate from a human community, perhaps a symbol of community but not the community itself" (Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez 2002, 165), he understands commons and community as inseparable dimensions of the same mutual process of producing collective livelihoods. If community is the construction, acknowledgment and active negotiation of interdependence, then the commons is the pool of shared material and symbolic elements that a community *makes*,

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narrower, meanings. I will, however, in this chapter and in the conclusion, sometimes slip between the two terms as each appears specifically useful.

96 "Unlike capital," writes Gudeman, "a base is not an integrated or systematic whole, measured by a single unit of account" (2008, 30).

*sustains, and draws from* in its work of living together. As Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez describe, "the commons is...the patrimony or legacy of a community and refers to anything that contributes to the material and social sustenance of people with a shared identity: land, buildings, seed stock, knowledge of practices, a transportation network, an educational system, rituals" (2002, 165). It is the sum total of all that a community makes and holds in common, as a source of identity and sustenance. "Contingent and locally specified," writes Gudeman, "a base mediates relationships between people and relates them to things. It is a heritage that lies outside the person as material resources, tools, and knowledge, and within as sediments from others that create an identity" (2008, 28).

There is, then, a crucial mutually-constitutive relationship between community and commons: "without a commons, there is no community; without a community, there is no commons" (Gudeman 2001, 27).<sup>97</sup> A community requires, for its sustenance, some pool of shared materiality or meaning, some stabilized collective wealth that lives outside of any individual but works to constitute the identities of all. Access to the commons, in this sense, constitutes access to identities of belonging with/as community. The boundaries of commons and community are thus coextensive. "Denying others access to the commons," assert Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez, "denies community with them,

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97 We might think, abstractly, of community as the process of consciously being-in-common and the commons as the *being* of that in-common, as the material-semiotic manifestation of --and, at once, the basis for--the *work* of community. De Angelis expresses this fundamental interconnection between commons and community quite effectively: The "relational field of community always presupposes and, through social practices, gives rise to commons around which the activities of the subjects are articulated. Every mode of doing needs commons. Indeed, to pose the question of commons is simply to recognize the social character of our doing, the fact that individuals are social and hence they must share something (language, land, sea, air, values, etc.); and, at the "Across cultures, the components of a base vary widely and range from transmitted learning and shared skills to fixed resources...there is not single type of base" (Gudeman 2008, 32-33). same time, what is shared is the result of a social production. Different modes of production differentiate on the basis of how commons are reproduced and of what are commons and what are not, which it to say, how communities of producers relate to each other" (De Angelis 2007, 243).

which is exactly what the assertion of private property rights does" (2002, 165). To be clear: the commons can itself be constituted as a form of private property, that is, private *communal* property, but it is the sense in which property can function as a right of exclusion, as a process of alienating materials or meanings from its shared place in community, that it becomes an anti-commons, an enclosure.<sup>98</sup>

If communities require commons, then converse is true as well: a commons cannot exist without a community. "A base is made, held and used through social relationships" (Gudeman 2008, 29). The commons, in other words, is never something that is "out there," a set of resource pools or a bundle of goods that is separate from the community that shares it. Things do not constitute a commons until and unless they are *made* into commons. It is in this sense that "there are no commons without commoning" (Helfrich 2009, quoting De Angelis). "Only that which is visible can be credible," says

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98 There is a messy issue here: what, really, makes "commons" distinct in terms of a property-based definition? If commons is posed as a kind of opposite to "private property," we run up against this challenge clearly: "The distinction between common and private property is misleading in that all commons (with the exception of global commons, such as space or Antarctica) include some people but exclude others from membership, and are private in the latter extended sense" (Nonini 2006, 166). In other words, nearly all commons are private property in the sense that a group of people may lay claim to ownership of the right to decide on the use of, access to, and disposition of a "commons." At least two distinctions are important here: first, unlike in a classic "private property" regime, commons property must involve more than one person. Individual ownership and control of a given resource does not constitute a commons. This is another way to say that a commons requires a community. Secondly, the issue may best be expressed not in terms of "private" versus "common" property, where one form is fundamentally alienable (able to be commodified) while the other is fundamentally socialized and non-commodified, but rather in terms of the specific *decisional forms* that property control and use take. It is a matter of who has control: commoners cannot draw from the commons to generate goods for external commodity exchange without a prior permission to do so allocated from the community of that commons (otherwise, it would be stealing from the commons for private gain, or privatization). Thus, internally, there is a non-market, non-privatized, non-commodified social allocation and allotment process to determine how the commons is managed and used. This internal process/structure is separate (i.e., - non-determinate of) the question of how these collectively-managed commons are then used and transformed (i.e., they may be commodified by the commoners for external sale). George (1998, xi) makes this clear: "Conflicts over the commons are not so much questions of public-versus-private as group-versus-individual ownership, with the group asserting the right to determine who is a member of the group and who is not. 'Commoners' [in the case of enclosure] are deprived of the right to define their own society."

Lafuente (2009, 4), and only that which is *made meaningful*, made *common*, to a community can be a commons. Gudeman is very clear on this point, making a strong distinction between a discourse of the commons and discourses of sustainable resource use that seek to place objective measures of energy or material flows at the center of economic calculation. "A base," he says, "is not the raw environment or even the 'through put,' as some ecological economists would have us understand the flow of resources and energy with which economies are made, because the base is locally constituted with shifting specifications" (2008, 30). This is another way to say that there is no "outside" to discourse, and that relationships between human communities and other communities (human and nonhuman) can always only be made visible through culturally-particular commoning discourses. Just because an ecologist (or an economist, or a sociologist) says that something is a part of a community's "base" or "commons" --says, for example, that the carbon cycle is part of the commons-- does not actually make this thing *common* to a given community.<sup>99</sup>

This is a challenging point to convey. Clearly, not all important constitutive interrelationships are accounted for, are made common, in every discourse of the commons. Not every actant involved in the work of making our lives possible (willing or unwilling) is described, made common, by a given community's shared understanding of their base. But *others* can't make these things common *on behalf of* a given community.

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<sup>99</sup> Gudeman points out, for example, that certain scientific discourses of ecological energy flows are common, but common to the scientists constituting the discourses. In other words, measures of energy are part of the *commons of ecologists* (while they may *not* be part of the commons of the communities the ecologists are studying!): "For example, to speak of the environment as 'through put' that can be measured by BTUs or some other ruler in order to display efficient or inefficient uses of the external world already represents a cultural story or 'basification' of the environment for one or another community of ecologists" (Gudeman 2008, 30).

For these relationships to enter the frame of human ethical deliberation, for nonhumans to become part of human communities, they must be *commoned*-- bound up in particular, shared narratives of being-in-common with and among specific human communities. What this implies is that the discourse of the commons can be a potentially powerful site of articulation between human and nonhuman communities, between and among heterogeneous participants in world-making. If there is no commons "out there," if commons are always made --and, like all things made, must be continually re-made-- then multiple openings may be found to engage in processes of *expanding and enlarging* these commons. The commons becomes, then, a process of identifying *what is shared (or what to share), with whom, and how this sharing should occur*. The particular power of such an investigation lies in the way that it works to performatively consolidate that which it names: the process of a community identifying (negotiating, struggling over) its commons is, at the same time, the process of that community *creating* this commons.

But wait: a brief aside is necessary. There is something dangerous lurking in this theorization, in this seemingly asymmetrical granting of agency to the commoners to make commons. Bound up as they are, community and commons appear to be articulated here as quite different ontological positions, and we would be remiss in neglecting to ask hard questions about such a discourse. In what way, specifically, might a division between community and commons, between those who share and that which is shared, tacitly reproduce the divide between human and nonhuman, culture and nature, subject and object, active producer and passive resource? Even understood as mutually constitutive, is the community/commons distinction actually a dangerous dualism in

disguise? Think, for example, about what it would mean to say that a particular human, or group of humans, is part of some community's "commons": morally questionable, no? This is the kind of move made when the "business community" seeks to steward the resource pool of their local or regional "labor force" by donating to job training centers--beneficial, perhaps, even in the eyes of many workers, but it is a move that occludes the question of who *controls* employment, and how everyone came to need (and want) such jobs in the first place. The unsettling question is open: if it's not acceptable to place other humans in "the commons," then should other (nonhuman) living beings be placed there as well? In what sense, for example, are the trees on the land where I live (land that is collectively owned through a community land trust) part of our commons? In what sense are they, rather, part of our community? Who are the commoners and who are the commons (or *commoned*)? Does this difference matter?

These questions call for a return to my discussion, earlier in this chapter, of community as the being-in-common of all *beings*. Such an ontology --particularly when coupled with an actor-network approach to the heterogeneity of actants-- invites us to unsettle this distinction between community and commons; to ask if there might be a different way to conceptualize the relationship between these two sides of the coin of being-together in the world. I have no answer to this question, though I wonder if it might lead us to feel that our concept of the "commons" should never include the bodies of other living beings. Perhaps the commons can only ever be that which *life* makes and shares out of nonliving elements of our world and creativity; perhaps "community" is always what emerges as living beings make and share worlds together. Perhaps the

chickens and fruit trees of a cooperative farm are not part of that farm's "commons," but rather participate in the constitution of the *community* that, together, *makes and shares the farm*. Perhaps the fish or lobster in coastal fisheries are not part of the fisherfolk's commons, but rather are members of the community that *make and share the fishery*.<sup>100</sup> These are ideas worth further exploration and clarification. When faced with the proposition that "a community economy makes and shares a commons" (Gudeman 2001, 27), what would it mean for us to engage our nonhuman relations as part of the community engaged in this making and sharing?

Noting these crucial questions as in need of further work, I wish now to dig a bit deeper into the details and content of Gudeman's theorization of the base or commons. As a powerful performative concept, the commons offers a potentially rich method for engaging a community in participatory processes of identifying itself and that which it shares (or wishes to share). But how might this identification occur? What, specifically, would we be looking for? What *makes* a commons? This is no simple question, since, as Gudeman writes, "across cultures, the components of a base vary widely and range from transmitted learning and shared skills to fixed resources...there is not single type of base" (2008, 32-33). He does, however, offer a loose typology to enable mappings of various commons.<sup>101</sup> A base or commons, for Gudeman, can be made of *knowledge and skills*

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100 Within commons discourse there is a common assertion presented (or assumed) that commons and commodity are the only two possible realms in which nonhuman life could be placed. Thus the (well intentioned) work of asserting the non-commodification of life in its various forms proceeds by *commoning*. What I am suggesting here is another path: rather than subsuming members of the biosphere as part of a commons, we might consider including them as part of our community (or, better yet, being thankful to be included in theirs). This has the ethical effect of placing nonhuman beings in the realm of mutuality without at the same time (re)constituting them as passive (albeit important and valued) resources for (active) human communities.

101 A number of other authors have created commons typologies (see, for example, Anatole Anton 2000; Hess 2008; Lafuente 2009; see, for example, Nonini 2006).



"often developed in relation to the material space a people occupy" (2008, 33); *material accumulations and services*, including "material holdings such as a stock of food, improved land, or tools and equipment" (2008, 34); *prohibited spaces*, "incommensurable zones...in which specific activities may not occur" (2008, 35); *sacra*, identity-constituting symbols such as flags, shrines or ideas, "on whose existence the community relies" (2008, 35); *unlimited base elements*, which "may be a seemingly plentiful resource, such as air, the sky, an ocean, a sea, or a forest" and which are often only partly claimed or constituted and may be shared with others (2008, 33); and, finally, *limited base elements*, "a bounded access resource" around which a community constitutes specific rules for use and sharing (2008, 33). These elements are, I believe, a good start. I have summarized, added to and augmented them in Figure 5 below.

Given these various dimensions of commons, how then do communities engage in the process of sharing them? Clearly some elements are shared simply by being always already shared, that is, through constituting the community itself as a mode of teaching, learning and being-in-community. This might be the case with, for example, the learning of language, the sharing of stories, or the common identification of *sacra*. It is the elements that are somewhat more limited, often material, that is of more concern. How are such things shared? Here, Gudeman identifies three primary dynamics at work: allotment, apportionment and reciprocity. *Allotments*, he proposes, are portions of a base or commons set aside, designated, for specific uses by specific people or groups (often at specific times and in specific ways). *Apportionments* are divisions of a flow, in which "fluid parts of the base may be apportioned, such as timber for culling and wild foods for

<b>Commons Elements</b>	<b>Key Questions</b>
Knowledge and skills	What forms of knowledge are made, shared and maintained by this community? What kinds of skills do we hold and pass along?
Stories	What shared stories do we tell about ourselves, our community and the world in which we live? Where and how do we tell these stories?
Material accumulations (savings, stock)	What forms of savings do we hold as a community? Do we share seeds, tools, clothes, music, money, or other things? Through what kinds of common structures is this sharing organized and stewarded?
Built or cared-for infrastructure	What have we built together that is shared by our community? What have we used, cared for, and added to? Buildings, soil, aquifers, roads, institutions? Through what shared structures and processes do we maintain this infrastructure?
Sacra and other symbols	What do we hold sacred as a community? What common symbols articulate our shared identities? Through what structures or processes do we honor and maintain these symbols and this identity?
Prohibited spaces or practices	What do we collectively say "no" to? What is off limits, out of bounds? Through what structures and practices do we enforce these limits?
Shared spaces or practices	What spaces or practices do we share as a community? How do we use and maintain them?
Non-limited resource pools	What kinds of resources do we draw on for our livelihoods that appear (to us) to be unlimited? How do we interact with these resources? How do we pay attention to their nature, status and use? How do we share them with others?
Limited resource pools and access rules	What kinds of resources do we draw on for our livelihoods that are limited, depletable and/or non-renewable and that we have collective control over? How do we care for these resources? How do we limit their use in respectful and responsible ways? Through what kinds of structures and practices do we limit and enable access and to whom?

**Figure 5: Elements of the Commons (adapted from Gudeman 2008).**

consumption. Such flows also include payment that help maintain the base, such as tribute, tithes, labor, and taxes" (2008, 38). These are both purely internal processes, constituting what Polanyi might consider as householding.<sup>102</sup> The third form of sharing, *reciprocity*, is more complex. Gudeman follows Polanyi in conceptualizing reciprocity as a symmetrical exchange and, as such, requiring at least two distinct groups. This means that reciprocity in a community takes at least two forms: first, reciprocity *within* that community, between members. Here, as "a form of sharing and a mode of identity formation, [reciprocity] is an adjunct of base making and its extension. Comprised of favors, things, and ideas, it links people and enhances (or detracts from) their well-being and material life" (Gudeman 2008, 41). In its second form, reciprocity links communities; it is an "interbase transaction, and it hovers between the incommensurate and the commensurate. A gift extends the base to others and so bestows an aspect of community." (2008, 20).

Having elaborated on these details, the question presents itself: might these representations of commons-based transactions help us to see economic possibilities differently, to identify diverse processes at work, to see new points for possible intervention in an alternative process of regional development? They certainly appear to enable a rendering-visible of key points of ethical decision in the process of making and sharing commons. We can for example, ask:

- What is allotted? To whom? Who decides?

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102 As Gudeman writes in this regard, "communal exchange is organized around allocations, which cannot be reduced to expressions of reciprocity because these forms of sharing help to constitute the collectivity, whereas reciprocity is a dyadic exchange between individuals or two groups" (2008, 40).

- What is apportioned? To whom? Who decides?
- What forms of reciprocity are at work in our community? Who participates in them and who does not? What kinds of relationships do they arise from and sustain? What kinds of reciprocity would we like to strengthen, expand and further cultivate within our community?
- What forms of reciprocity does our community enact with other communities? In what ways do these connections enlarge our sense of community itself? To whom would we like to extend community and what forms of reciprocity might facilitate these new connections?

These questions, combined with those raised in Figure 5, can serve as starting points for the elaboration of an investigative framework around the commons and the process of commoning, building on and adding to Gibson-Graham's (2006b) recognition of such a site as a key "ethical coordinate" in the construction of other economic relationships (explored further below).

A clarification may be necessary. Faced with these questions of ethical negotiation, and with the notion of the commons as a key point in such processes, what does it really mean to say that the commons is a "value practice"? When Gudeman distinguishes between market and mutuality as realms of value, what does this signify? Are we invoking a certain mythology of the commons as a domain of harmony, cooperation and solidarity? Does the making and sharing of a commons necessarily lead to a more equitable, liberated world? I think not; or, at least, not necessarily. It is

important here, I believe, to be clear that the making and sharing of commons--and, more generally, the constitution of community--are practices of enacting *ethical spaces of negotiation*. The ethical *outcomes* of this negotiation are always open, always uncertain. Community and commons are a key site in which equity, generosity, compassion, cooperation and solidarity might be most effectively realized, but these are never guaranteed. A fascist community is still a community, and it, too, makes and shares a commons. The concept of the commons does not automatically insert liberation into all that it touches; rather, it makes *visible* the bare sociality, the material and symbolic forms of connection and interrelation within which *struggles* for liberation must occur. Mutuality, in Gudeman's formulation, is not identical with socialist utopia. Mutuality is the realm in which values (uncertain, unspecified beforehand) of being-together are enacted. Market, then, signifies a domain of values in which this being-together is made invisible or subducted in the name of a clean, calculative relation in which only *price* comes to matter.

With this clarification in mind, let us return to the question of markets in the market/mutuality binary. As described earlier, Gudeman views markets as domains of calculative reason that arise in contexts of anonymous trade. It is only when mutuality has been eclipsed or not-yet-constituted that otherwise socially-tangled, incommensurate goods and services can be equilibrated into exchange-values. Market relations are characterized, then, by "price fetishism" in which the social and ecological conditions that gave rise to an exchangeable item are covered over by a process of commensuration. Such a process encourages the kinds of rationalities and social dynamics associated with

*Homo economicus*, the rational maximizer. In such a context, Gudeman asserts, the conditions are ripe for calculative rationalities to begin colonizing various commons-- a process he calls "cascading" (2008, 60).

Many of the specifics of Gudeman's analysis here are, I believe questionable; his equation of markets with calculative reason, for example, or his suggestion that *Homo economicus* actually comes to exist (rather than being, as others have suggested, an always-failed project).<sup>103</sup> What is interesting, however, is where he goes with this analysis next. Gudeman is not *against* markets; while highly critical of the dangers (and actualized tendencies) of market relations to "cascade," he recognizes that certain forms of constrained calculative rationality may not always be destructive. Precisely because markets arise in contexts of relational distance, and because actualized community with *everyone* may not be possible, we must be open to the potential for certain forms of exchange-value-based transaction to be positive. What does this look like? Gudeman's conceptualization of the commons as a communal process of sharing enables him to detach the idea from its frequent association as the *opposite* of the commodity form (see, for example Dyer-Witherford 2010). Commodities are, indeed, things that have been alienated from a commons (somewhere), but they are not its contrary. Communities can, sometimes, *make commodities from their commons*, Gudeman suggests, *without destroying these commons*.

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103 I would also point out Gudeman's tendency to see "cascading" as a one-way process in which only markets appear able to colonize commons and not the other way around. We would need a theorization enabling us to see both markets and commons as active forces able to contest (and colonize) one another, depending on the conditions and the context-- the outcome not of an inherent necessity but of historical struggle.

The operative question in examining the relationship between mutuality and market is about the extent to which a given set of market relations (i.e., commodification, or the selling of goods and services as exchange-values) is *debasing* or *base-building*. This is, of course, fundamentally a question of the democratic control of the commons: to the extent that a commons is overtaken by institutions or forces from outside of the community that makes and shares it (colonization), or to the extent that some portion of that community *encloses* it (privatization), no commodification can be understood as "base-building" or commons-enhancing. To the extent, however, that a community maintains control over its shared base and chooses, through negotiation and collective decision, to generate goods or services for export beyond that base, the potential--no guarantee--exists for a base-building commodification. Following de Peuter and Dyer-Witford's analysis (2010), this is precisely what characterizes worker-owned cooperatives as forms of commoning: they constitute communities, making and sharing a base, and choosing to sell products as a strategy to *build* that base. We can ask, therefore, of any commoning activity (including production and sale of products via markets): is this activity diminishing or supporting (or changing) the base of a community? Does a given form of export production diminish our base? Does it enable imports that expand our base? Do we end up with an increased rational-calculative domain in our region and a shrinking base of mutuality? Are these the kinds of economic relations that we want?

This way of thinking suggests two important things about the market/mutuality distinction that Gudeman, I believe, is missing. First, it opens up the possibility that markets are not coextensive with self-interested calculative reason. If markets can

sometimes serve the commons, then we must recognize the ability of commoners to operate with/in these markets in ways that are not necessarily individualist, maximizing and "disjointed" (as Gudeman 2008, 64, describes). We need a more diverse and nuanced analysis of the nature(s) of markets that opens them up as spaces of difference and ethical negotiation. Second, Gudeman's distinction between base-building and debasing activities suggests a set of value practices that might lie *outside* his market/mutuality binary. Yes, I am suggesting now (ironically) that we theorize the existence of a "third sector," constituted by value practices that are not reducible to market transactions but are debasing nonetheless. When a member of a cooperative steals from the collective treasury; when a community member brings violence upon another; when commoners in one place degrade the commons of another place to enhance or protect their own: these are all forms of *non-market debasing*.

An interesting way to entertain this idea visually is to attempt a mapping of Gudeman's theory onto the "iceberg diagram" of economic diversity developed and utilized by Gibson-Graham. The original iceberg (Figure 6) depicts the common "capitalocentric" view of economy as the tip, exposed to the light of day, with an array of other diverse economic practices constituting the (hidden) majority of the picture. Gudeman's notion of the "base," also a kind of hidden majority submerged below a discursively dominant market "tip," maps quite well onto this graphic and allows us to give a name as well to those practices that can be said live in the gray-area below the waterline (Figure 7).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Note that this alternative iceberg depiction remains tied to a somewhat homogenized notion of "market." Such is the consequence of useful, but oversimplified, diagrams.





Figure 6: The (Original) Iceberg (from Gibson-Graham 2006b, 70).

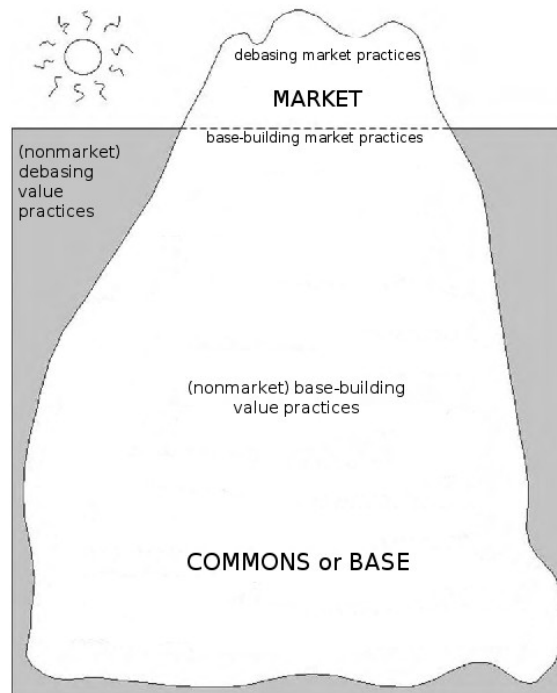


Figure 7: Modified "Commons" Iceberg.

This reformulation of Gudeman's concept seems to suggest a dualism that cuts somewhat differently than that of the market/mutuality distinction. If markets can serve either base-building or debasement, and if nonmarket activity can do the same, then the axis of differentiation must be found instead between what we might call *commoning* and *uncommoning*. On one hand, we have relationships and processes that either bind us together with one another or make our already-bound togetherness more apparent and visible; on the other hand, we have processes which rend us apart or cover over the constitutive interdependencies of which our worlds and lives are made. It is true that market relations, in their abstracted, delocalized and anonymous forms--confronting us as "the law of supply and demand"--are often powerful forces of uncommoning. Religious

and scientific ideologies that posit ontological divides between beings, between groups of people (human and nonhuman) or between cultures are also uncommoning processes.

Indeed, some commons are constituted through the uncommoning of others.

This, then, opens us to another (and, for this thesis, final) set of questions around the ethical dynamics of the commons. It may often be the case that value practices of commons enrichment constitute the *debasement* of another commons. What appears as base-building to one group of commoners might appear as a form of banditry or theft to another. Community, as many theorists have shown, can be as much about exclusion from value as about inclusion (see, for example Young 1990). This is, of course, precisely what Gibson-Graham seeks to avoid through her theorization of community as a space of openness, incompleteness, of the "negativity at the heart of the community economy" (2006b, 98). Yet the materiality, the *finitude*, of certain types of commons calls forth an inevitable positivity in the actual practice of community that generates boundaries and exclusions. We confront crucial and difficult questions, then, about who is included in a given commons and how we visibilize and constitute ethical dynamics between commons and their "outsides," between one commons and another, and between commons that are nested in geographic and other relational scales.

How often, we must ask, for example, does the enrichment of one commons come at the expense of another? How often does one forms of commoning build its strength by *uncommoning*? How do we trace and account for these constitutive interrelationships? Plumwood's concept of "shadow places" is instructive here, and calls forth a related notion of "shadow commons." As Plumwood describes, "this culture creates a split

between a singular, elevated, conscious 'dwelling' place, and the multiple disregarded places of economic and ecological support...the many unrecognised, shadow places that provide our material and ecological support, most of which, in a global market, are likely to elude knowledge and responsibility" (2008, 139). This is as true for the domain of the commons as it is in the domain of market-based consumption. The forest "commons" of the Northeastern United States, for example, shared in diverse and complex ways by many communities, are underwritten in large part by the outsourcing of violent timber harvesting to the Global South (Jensen and Draffan 2003). This dynamic leads Mies and Benholdt-Thomsen to point out that there can be "no reinvention of the commons in the North without defending the commons in the South" (1999, 144). While I have no good answers to the question of shadow commons, it is clear that in our tracings of the ethical negotiations of commoning, in our investigations of alternative possibilities for the construction of more equitable, dignified, joyful and responsible economies in our regions, we must engage these issues. Local development cannot proceed without regional solidarity, and regional development cannot proceed without a more global (or globally networked) solidarity. One commons must learn to honor and defend the others. If there is to be any positive ethical content built into the notion of commons, perhaps it should be an injunction to fight uncommoning, the severing of relationship or the rendering invisible of relationship, wherever it may occur. I will return to this issue in the conclusion of this thesis.

## *Diverse Economies*

We arrive now at our final conceptual stop in this thesis' journey to explore alternative theorizations of economic ontology. This terrain will be somewhat different than that presented and evoked by Polanyi and Gudeman. While each of these authors, in their own ways, have unique and important insights into the theorization of other economies and economic dynamics, they also present a certain affective space of closure or constriction in their approaches. Both make a crucial shift, as we have seen, from a performance of the economy as a structured space or totality to economy as a process, an institutional or ethical dynamic offering no necessities or guarantees and, because of this, numerous possibilities for what livelihoods might yet become. Yet Polanyi and Gudeman also remain wedded to a certain kind of totalizing theory; both claim to have arrived at conceptualizations that capture, in some grand sense, the totality of economic life, and both frame this totality in terms of a relatively small number of concepts or patterns. Gibson-Graham, whose notions of "ethical coordinates" and "diverse economies" I will engage in this section of the chapter, presents us with quite a different conceptual space. Indeed, the very affect invoked in me as I enter this portion of writing is one of spaciousness: a deep breath, an opening, an invitation to explore and to proliferate concepts without restriction. If anything, I struggle here not with closure or constraint but with the challenges of *proliferation*: what to do with so many possible categories and questions, so many sites of negotiation, so much difference?

Much of this effect lies, I believe, in Gibson-Graham's approach to theory itself. An awareness of the performativity of discourse lies at the forefront of her work in a way

that highlights not only the ways in which ideas can help to articulate material relations in the world, but also the ways in which particular approaches to thinking generate *affects* in the *thinker*. Seeking to avoid conceptual work (all-too-common in Left academia) that reinforces a sense of paralysis, despair, paranoia and a kind of "all-knowingness about the world" (2006b, 3), Gibson-Graham invites us to think our way into feeling differently about what we desire, what is possible, and what it means to be alive together in the world. "If our goal as thinkers is the proliferation of different economies," she writes, "what we most need is an open and hospitable orientation toward the objects of our thought" (2006b, 6). One of her strategies to achieve this is the cultivation of a "beginners mind" in which we open ourselves to seeing the world anew and "refuse to know too much" (2006b, 8).

This stance leads Gibson-Graham to conceptualize economy and economic dynamics through what Sedgwick (following Tompkins) calls "weak theory," that is, a mode of theorization that avoids grand or totalizing claims yet nonetheless enables action-enhancing engagement with the world. Strong theory, in this understanding, seeks to "account for a 'wide spectrum of phenomena,' accumulating power as [they] order more and more of the world" (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 204). As a search for unifying and generalizable knowledge and structural patterns, it has become "the commonly accepted criterion by which the explanatory power of any scientific theory can be evaluated" (Tompkins, quoted in Sedgwick 2003, 134). Weak theory, in contrast, is characterized by a kind of epistemological humility. Rather than trying to capture generalizable dynamics, processes and characteristics of the social world, weak theory functions to organize

reality loosely and provisionally, drawing on the performative power of language to generate useful effects. As Gibson-Graham describes:

Little more than description, weak theory couldn't know that social experiments are already co-opted and thus doomed to fail or to reinforce dominance; it couldn't tell us that the world economy will be transformed by an international revolutionary movement rather than through the disorganized proliferation of local projects (2006b, 8).

Similarly, weak theory could not "know" that the complex dynamics of economic construction can be captured by a theory of two "economic movements," a four-part theory of "forms of integration," or a dual distinction between "market and mutuality."<sup>105</sup>

Proceeding along these lines, Gibson-Graham offers a series of propositions about the sites, relations and dynamics of livelihood construction that open up space for thinking about diverse practices, linkages and possibilities. Economic life, she suggests, is composed of a proliferation of activities, ranging across myriad sectors, and every economic actor--an individual, an enterprise, a community--participates in and is constituted by many of these activities simultaneously (or sometimes sequentially when

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<sup>105</sup>To be clear: strong theory is not, in itself, a bad thing; work such as that of Polanyi and Gudeman--or, even "stronger," work by theorists of capitalist dynamics such as Harvey (1982; 2007; 2010) and Smith (2008)--can be crucial for naming trends, developing strong political interventions and articulating struggles. At issue is whether such strong theory is best suited to (by itself) serve the strategic needs of movements working for alternative forms of local and regional development. What I suggest here, following Gibson-Graham, is that while such movements can (and must) link with, draw upon and contribute to strong theoretical work, the development of new regional economic imaginaries and the construction of movements to enact them might proceed most productively along "weak theory" lines. This is the case, first, because of the kinds of hopeful and open affects (discussed above) that weak theory approaches can invigorate; and second, because strong theory, while quite good at generating *explanation* and argument (often over that explanation), is not particularly good at *connection*. In a sense, the more "complete" a theory attempts to be, the less capacity it has as a point of identification by multiple constituencies and worlds. The *strength* of strong theory proceeds from the development of conceptual exclusions that necessarily shrink the sphere of worlds that are included in its reach. Weak theory, on the other hand, while less effective at generating and sustaining explanatory frameworks, can be quite good at developing and energizing connections. It is the very *incompleteness* of weak theory--its humility--that gives it strength as an organizing tool. The not-knowing-for-certain of weak theory sustains a continual opening. Like the ever-incomplete self, it is "partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another" (Haraway 1991, 193, italics mine).

moving from one relation to the next). "Economic sectors, enterprises and subjects occupy multiple sites in the diverse economy" (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 72). Even the most hardened capitalist banker might share a meal with friends, trade favors with a colleague, shop at a consumer-owned cooperative, care for a sick elder, volunteer at the youth center, provide a no-interest loan to a nephew, and grow tomatoes in the garden.

The precise nature of these economic "sites" is, furthermore, never finally determined, and certainly not determined by their forms of structure or organization. Each must be understood as a site of negotiation and struggle, offering "different realms of freedom as well as opportunities for exploitation and oppression depending on circumstances" (2006b, 72). To be sure, there may be tendencies within each site, historical patterns and embodied constraints or openings, but there are no guarantees that such structures will lead to particular forms of freedom, dignity, joy, cooperation-- or subjection, deprivation and suffering. To work in a cooperative, for example, is not to enter a space of structural cooperation; it is to enter a space in which cooperation must continually emerge from processes of relational learning, conflict, and personal and collective transformation.

Neither does there exist a necessary set of connections or relationships *between* these sites. While patterns of interconnection may exist, and have historical roots and thus performative weight, there is nothing *essential* about the linkages of any two (or three or four) economic sites, relationships or practices. "Economic dynamics," writes Gibson-Graham, "are overdetermined and thus the relationship between activities in different sites cannot be predicted but is open to politics and other contingencies" (2006b, 72).

Patterns are made and unmade, like the sites themselves, through indeterminate processes of *struggle and articulation*. This is a crucial theoretical move, one that frees us from the need to bundle multiple processes and institutions together in systemic packages. Money, markets, calculative practices, profit, dynamics of accumulation, usury practices, wage labor, entrepreneurial rewards, private property, and industrial production processes are not inherently, *essentially*, connected as parts of a pre-determined "structure" called "capitalism"; they are diverse sites and practices that have been actively *linked* together--through tedious, difficult, uncertain and ongoing processes of construction. They are also, crucially, sites that are always already linked with *other* processes, other relationships, and thus never *fully* articulated within one singular "bundle."

What this suggests, for Gibson-Graham, is that economic possibility is not a matter of imagining new "systems" to replace the current "one," nor is it a matter of finding and promoting rare structures and institutions that live only in the distant margins, far away from the essentially-corrupted sites of the dominant economy. No discourse or practice of purity is required. "Political struggles have the capability to diversify the economy and change relations and activities within it" (2006b, 72). Because economy is multiple, because economic identity is plural, because every connection and every emergent relationship and experience is a matter of imaginative and courageous construction, then other economies are always fully possible. This is why economic discourse--economic ontology--is so crucial and powerful in the process of economic transformation: we are hindered from imagining and making other economies not because of inherent structural "barriers," but because we have internalized discourses of



economic necessity that have squashed hope, diverted imagination, and cultivated a sense of collective powerlessness in the face of a monstrous "system." The power of new ontologies of economic diversity and possibility lies in their potential to transform these affects and enable a new sense of capacity. It is only by feeling powerful that we will then be capable of constructing *movements* to enact the connections we imagine.

To provide some initial tools for these imaginings, Gibson-Graham offers two loose, avowedly-incomplete "weak theory" frameworks-- one, the "ethical coordinates," for identifying points of negotiation and decision in the process of constituting economies; and the other, the diverse economies framework" (or DEF), as a way to map existing and potential options for organizing various aspects of economic life. Both of these frameworks are meant to be non-comprehensive and to function as open tools for enabling processes of mapping, identification and conversation about the forms in which our economic being-in-common might take. I will explore each framework in turn.

The concept of "coordinates" is drawn by Gibson-Graham from De Angelis (2003), who develops it as a way to talk about the role of the concepts "community" and "commons" in organizing social movements. For De Angelis, these ideas do not constitute pre-formed political discourses or big-picture structural proposals but are, rather, points of articulation around which movements might create themselves as spaces of collective visioning and action. Coordinates such as these "can help us organize our thinking and practices of alternatives... They are not elements of a fixed ideology, a dogma that we have to subscribe to. They provide both an intellectual and political horizon that we can enrich through our practices and thinking in the context of concrete

struggles" (De Angelis 2003, 4). Gibson-Graham builds on and expands this project, proposing four "coordinates around which being-in-common is economically negotiated" (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009, 147). These are: necessity, surplus, consumption and commons. We can easily imagine, around each of these coordinates, processes of collective exploration and deliberation in a participatory regional development process.

The coordinate of *necessity* encourages us to ask, on both an individual and collective scale, "what do we need?" This is, in a sense, the first value practice of economic life, for negotiating our needs opens up essential questions about what it means to be alive, what our bodies, minds, hearts and communities require and desire in order to be healthy and to thrive. Here, we also engage questions about the line between survival and well-being: what is life, and what is a good life? Who determines this? How do we sort out the complexity of narratives and identities that we have been presented with (and that we have internalized) in regard to these questions? Furthermore, as Roelvink and Gibson-Graham point out, "decision-making about necessity must not only be relevant to the human body and its culturally-conditioned needs but also must consider the needs of other entities as part of the overdetermined process of production in a community economy" (2009, 150). What "we" need is an issue that opens up to our earlier questions about who constitutes our communities. With whom are we bound? With whose needs are we interdependent? How do we honor and respond to these relationships?

*Surplus*, as a coordinate, opens up a host of questions. While Gibson-Graham draws specifically on a Marxian reading of surplus, the issues can be framed more generally: first, do (and should) we produce surplus (i.e., more than we "need")? If so,

what form should it take? Second, who should appropriate this surplus? In Gibson-Graham's account, following Resnick and Wolff (1989), class processes (capitalist, slave, feudal, independent) are defined by this question: do those who *own* the means of production get the surplus (as in capitalist class processes)? Should those who *produce* the surplus appropriate the fruits of their labor (as in a communal or communist class process)? These are fundamental questions of equity and fairness that must be negotiated, struggled over, and (momentarily) decided. Third, to where should this surplus go? How should it be distributed? Here we encounter key issues regarding the reproduction and well-being of our broader communities, for it is the surplus that sustains all those who cannot produce--children, elders, and others--and those whose work is crucial but not generative of surplus itself (the so-called "nonproductive" workers).<sup>106</sup> And surplus is not just a category involving humans: as Bataille argues (1991), the sun is the source of our ultimate surplus and it is the photosynthesizers, the primary producers, who generate nearly all of the energy upon which human economies run (Margulis and Sagan 1995). How do these, the *first* "workers of the world" fare in our negotiations over the appropriation and distribution of surplus?<sup>107</sup>

The coordinate of *consumption* is somewhat more slippery in Gibson-Graham's formulation. In one sense, it is bound in their presentation to questions of surplus: "when

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106 That the discussion of "productive" versus "nonproductive" work falls, in Gibson-Graham's presentation, under the coordinate of "consumption." As I will discuss further, I prefer to link it with surplus.

107 This focus on ethical negotiations of surplus might allow us to clarify the issue of base-building and debasing raised by Gudeman and discussed earlier. The process of deciding how to engage with markets and commodity production from a given commons must, first, be a process of coming to understand what that community/ commons needs to sustain itself and thus what might be surplus that can be used to generate income (in the form of money or other external inputs) into that base.

it comes to the distribution of social surplus... decisions rest on what kinds of consumption will serve and strengthen a community economy" (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 93). This is a crucial dimension, but it may be only one component of a broader set of issues regarding *what* and *how* we use all that is produced in our economic processes. Consumption, as a point of ethical negotiation, links the coordinates of necessity and surplus together in calling us to ask questions about the real practices that we engage in to individually and collectively constitute our lives. How does what we need line up with what we use? Do we use more than our "share"? How does our consumption connect with, relate to, consumption by others? Tools such as the ecological footprint (Hansson and Wackernagel 1999) and measures of the appropriation of net primary production (Haberl et al. 2004) might help us to engage these questions in ways that connect us with a multiscalar picture of our interrelationships.

Gibson-Graham's formulation of the coordinate of *commons* is drawn primarily from Gudeman (2001). We have seen, earlier in this chapter, some of the ways in which a more detailed exploration of this work can contribute to our understanding of what is entailed in making and sharing commons. We are confronted at the very outset with two intertwined questions: first, who is (or should be) part of our community? (a question that can be asked in the context of questions about access to commons); second, what is (or should) be part of our commons? From here, we engage questions about allocation, allotment and reciprocity--or, more generally, questions about how transactions within a community are constituted and how the specific forms they take help (or not), in turn, to constitute that community's commons. And how, then, do we engage the world of trade

beyond a given commons? How do we negotiate the complexities of market relations, recognizing both the possibilities and the dangers in such pathways? "Whether to deplete, maintain, or grow the commons is a major focus of ethical decision-making," writes Gibson-Graham (97), and the specific relationships through which we do this work are at the crux of constituting the very core of our economic being-in-common. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for contemporary projects of constituting commons, Plumwood's notion of "shadow places," translated into a concept of shadow commons, invites us to investigate the interrelationships *between* commons, between *communities*. How do we take responsibility, cultivate solidarity, among and between multiple communities and commons? Through what structures, institutions and narratives can such relationships be built and maintained?

To Gibson-Graham's four-part formulation I would add (for now, at least) one further coordinate; that of *accounting*. As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, processes of counting and calculation have been powerful performative forces in the construction of economies and economic relationships. Enlisting numbers into a given discourse is a key strategy for strengthening (and, for better or for worse) generating the appearance of the "naturalness" or "reality" of a given construction. Things are not real, many believe (or, at least, tacitly feel) unless we can measure them. While a vigilant critique of such logic is necessary, it may also be strategically wise to draw on the strength of numbers in our alternative economic performances. And this is not just a strategy: what *counts* has much to do with what we value, what we wish to make visible and durable in the world. This is thus a crucial point of negotiation for a community economy and for a project of regional

development: what do we want to measure? What do we value? What elements and dynamics of our livelihoods do we wish to make visible through the process of counting? How, furthermore, should we measure *success* in a project of regional development? Such questions open up interesting pathways for exploring various existing alternative frameworks for regional economic measurement and for new processes through which communities might develop their own indicators and forms of regional accounting. A summary and elaboration of these five ethical coordinates is shown in Figure 8.

<b>Ethical Coordinates for Community Economies</b> Points of Negotiation and Struggle	
<b>Necessity</b>	What do we need as individuals? What do we need as communities? Who constitutes the "we" that needs?
<b>Surplus</b>	Is surplus produced and, if so, in what form? How (by whom) is surplus appropriated? To where or who (and by whom) is surplus distributed? For what is surplus used?
<b>Consumption</b>	What do we use, and how do we use it? Do we use more than we need? Less than we need? How is our consumption linked with that of others? What are the ethical entanglements that our consumption entails?
<b>Commons</b>	What commons do we make and share? How do we constitute and maintain our commons? How do our commons interface with markets and trade? How do our commons relate to the commons of others?
<b>Accounting</b>	How do we measure our economies? What do we value and how do we count this? What relationships do we want to make visible through accounting? How do we measure success in a process of collective development?

**Figure 8: Five Coordinates of Ethical Economic Negotiation (adapted from Gibson-Graham 2006b).**

While these ethical coordinates help us to ask questions about the interrelationships in which we are bound and which constitute our economic lives, the *diverse economies framework* (DEF) offers a loose schematic with which to identify existing (and possible) forms of economic organization across multiple sectors and "moments" of the process of livelihood construction. This is, as Gibson-Graham describes, a tool for "convening the knowledge that destabilizes capitalist dominance and unleashes new creative forces and subjects for economic experimentation" (2006b, 60). It is also, admittedly for Gibson-Graham, just a starting point, convening only "*some* of the radical diversity of economic relations" (2006b, 60, italics mine). "These economic practices," she writes in a note, "exist in complex combination with each other and with the many more dimensions of difference that could be added to this discussion" (2006b, 214, n.19). Nevertheless, this schema offers a robust starting point with which to seek and see economic diversity, and upon which to add additional categories and patterns. As shown in Figure 9, each of the three categories of economic relation is divided into three subcategories (rows). The first of these are the domains of hegemonic conceptions of economy: wage labor, capitalist enterprises and market transactions. These are the portions of each category that are generally "visible" at the tip of the iceberg (Figure 6 above) and in the economic ontologies of conventional RED. The second rows depict "alternative" takes on conventional understandings of labor, enterprises and markets. Here, hegemonic interpretations of paid labor as "wage labor for a capitalist firm" are broken open to reveal multiple sites in which work is remunerated with money but without taking the form of *waged* work; interpretations of markets as essentialized

relations of calculative rationality (see Gudeman, for example) are challenged by the identification of multiple forms of exchange-value-based trade that operate by different (and quite complex) value systems; and interpretations of firms as sites of capitalist accumulation are rendered more complex by the naming of quite diverse forms of business organization in which non-producers appropriate surplus. Finally, the third rows expose to view many of the livelihood practices most marginalized in conventional RED discourses: multiple forms of unpaid labor, numerous practices and patterns of nonmarket transaction and transfer, and an assortment of noncapitalist forms of organization for the appropriation and distribution of surplus.

TRANSACTIONS	LABOR	ENTERPRISE
MARKET	WAGE	CAPITALIST
<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b> <i>Sale of public goods</i> <i>Ethical "fair-trade" markets</i> <i>Local trading systems</i> <i>Alternative currencies</i> <i>Underground market</i> <i>Co-op exchange</i> <i>Barter</i> <i>Informal market</i>	<b>ALTERNATIVE PAID</b> <i>Self-employed</i> <i>Cooperative</i> <i>Indentured</i> <i>Reciprocal labor</i> <i>In-kind</i> <i>Work for welfare</i>	<b>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</b> <i>State enterprise</i> <i>Green capitalist</i> <i>Socially responsible firm</i> <i>Nonprofit</i>
<b>NONMARKET</b> <i>Household flows</i> <i>Gift giving</i> <i>Indigenous exchange</i> <i>State allocations</i> <i>State appropriations</i> <i>Gleaning</i> <i>Hunting, fishing, gathering</i> <i>Theft, poaching</i>	<b>UNPAID</b> <i>Housework</i> <i>Family care</i> <i>Neighborhood work</i> <i>Volunteer</i> <i>Self-provisioning labor</i> <i>Slave labor</i>	<b>NONCAPITALIST</b> <i>Communal</i> <i>Independent</i> <i>Feudal</i> <i>Slave</i>

**Figure 9: The Diverse Economies Framework (from Gibson-Graham 2006b, 71).**

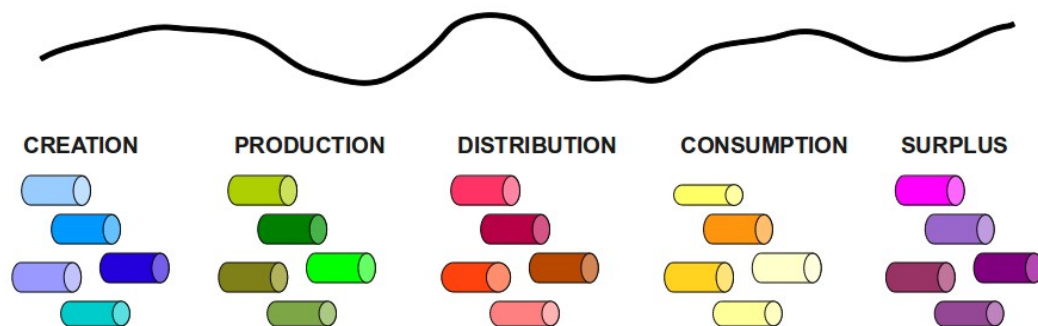


For Gibson-Graham, this loose framework provides a kind of "worksheet" with which to guide people and communities in participatory processes of identifying economic diversity and, in so doing, cultivating both affective hope and imaginative investigation regarding possible new pathways for local and regional development. The framework--in various forms--has been used in a number of participatory action research projects in the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts (USA), the Latrobe Valley (Victoria, Australia) and the municipality of Jagna in the Philippines (Cameron and Gibson 2005a; 2005b; Gibson and Cameron 2005; Gibson, Cahill, and McKay 2010; Gibson-Graham 2006b; Healy and Graham 2009). It can be used, for example, to examine particular sectors (such as childcare), specific enterprises and the multiple economic relationships they constitute (and are constituted by), or entire geographically-specific communities (as in Jagna). It could, presumably, be used at regional scales as well, to facilitate collective processes of examining *regional* economic diversity and possibility. Across multiple location and sites, the diverse economies framework enables us to ask: what is our economy now, and, in light of this, what do we want it to be? The implication is that the work of constructing alternative regional economic futures does not need to start from scratch, but may proceed by "starting where you are and building on what you have" (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 169).

As with all such tools, of course, there are a number of challenges that this particular way of depicting economic diversity presents for us. None of these, I believe, are at all "fatal" to the project, and I do not wish to spend time seeking or picking at them. I want, instead, for the DEF to call forth creativity in exploring other possible tools

through which similar effects might be achieved. With this spirit of collaborative inquiry and toolbox-creation in mind, I wish to engage in two explorations (one tiny, one more substantive) inspired by and through the diverse economies framework.

First, one question or challenge that Gibson-Graham herself has identified (2008) is the tendency to "read across" the various columns of the diagram as if the specific forms described in each column were necessarily (i.e., "structurally") linked to those in the other columns located in the same positions. This challenge is highlighted by the already-ingrained tendency to link market-wage-capitalism in a naturalized chain of economic process as if each were necessary to the other and, in each others' presences, inevitably linked. As a small and somewhat playful contribution to the discussion of this representational challenge, I suggest that a possible way to present these (and other) columns is through the metaphor of a series of boxes containing beads to be strung in an "economic chain." Using categories that I will expand on further below (though any categories could be used here), I illustrate this image in Figure 10 below. Such a representation might be developed as a kind of game for use in participatory visioning



**Figure 10: Economic Articulation As the Stringing-Together of Sites.**

processes, enabling participants to represent complex existing linkages and to explore different combinations of linkages between economic practices and forms.

Second, Gibson-Graham is clear that the three realms of economic relation specified in the DEF diagram are not (by far) comprehensive. Many more forms of economic diversity exist and processes of imaginative and participatory regional development may benefit from a more expansive view. This is an invitation, then, to brainstorm further categories through which to represent and identify economic diversity across a variety of contexts. As one possible elaboration (among many), I propose a version of the DEF framework inspired by a combination of the existing categories, Lynn Margulis' biology, key terms from economic anthropology (see, for example, Narotzky 1997), and numerous conversations with collaborators.<sup>108</sup> The core categories in this version are *creation*, *(re)production*, *transfer*, *consumption* (or use), *surplus*, *waste*, and *governance*. Many of these categories, as roughly and only partially elaborated in Figures 11-17, can be divided into a number of sub-columns corresponding to key questions, sites, forms of organization or choices in that "moment" of economic life. The larger categories can be elaborated as follows:

Creation (Figure 11). Many ontologies of economy begin with "production" as the originary site of economic activity, since in a human-centered world, production is the initial realm of activity in which (human) labor transforms resources from "nature" into use-values for exchange or consumption (see, for example, Marx 1977, Ch. 1). Yet this move is the erasure of the core relationships with make all livelihood possible. As Margulis points out, all life requires inputs of energy, matter and meaning from

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<sup>108</sup> Olivia Geiger, in particular, has helped extensively to think through these categories.

relationships with other living beings and nonliving contexts (pers. comm.).<sup>109</sup> Energy can here be understood as relationships involving movements of power, of active excitations that do things (this should, as Olivia Geiger points out, include *desire*); matter can be understood as stabilized relationships that have various qualities of weight, durability, structure, (etc.); and meaning can be understood as relationships of significance, of knowledge-making and knowledge-sharing (hence "creativity"), immediate or embodied in symbolic form (such as language). Where this energy, matter and meaning come from and how they are translated and transformed into generative relationships in production processes are, in a sense, the *first* economic questions.<sup>110</sup>

Conventional economics has pretended, for too long, that the inputs into (human) processes of production are *resources* and not *relationships*. Such a discourse supports and sustains an uncommoning, a stance of instrumentality and detachment, that enables us to cover over and deny the actual relational consequences of our pre-productive activities. Taking water and air for use without thought; stripping the earth of minerals and fossil energies; "extracting" timber or other "raw materials" from a passive, relationally-dead world; utilizing (or, worse, "harnessing") the creative energies of artists, dreamers, inventors and craftspeople; "capitalizing" on ancient forms of symbolic knowledge: these are the acts of uncommoning that arise when *creation* is not placed as a

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109 "Meaning" is, in this sense, what some would call "information." It is perhaps best understood not as an "input" but as a relationship in which life--as a matter of its very existence as such--constitutes and engages with an "outside" (beyond the membrane of organism or community) that is significant, meaningful as outside or "other." Life originates, as Maturana and Varela (Maturana and Varela 1980; 1992) suggest, as a process of making matter *matter*.

110 I do not use the term "creation" to indicate toward a creator (as an ego projection of ourselves writ large, for example), but rather to draw on the performative weight of the term in spiritual and religious discourse in a way that points toward the *mystery of being* which always exceeds us and must, in some sense, be a presence at the heart of all economic practice.

core relational category of economic thought and practice. How do (and should) we organize--institutionally--our constitutive relationships with creation, with the flows of energy, matter and meaning from which we materialize and to which we contribute? What kinds of responsibilities are called forth in these relations?

CREATION			
	Source	How is it captured or refined?	Who controls it?
<b>Energy</b>	Sun (direct) Sun (fossil) Chemical Geothermal Kinetic Libidinal	Primary producers Secondary producers Human technology (tertiary or quaternary production)	Commodity producers  Community/Commons  Open access regime
<b>Matter</b>	Earth Space	Mining Collecting Recycling	
<b>Meaning</b>	Language Stories Knowledge Dreams Skills Relationships	Commodification (theft) Sharing	

**Figure 11: Creation As a Key Category of Economic Relationship.**

(Re)production (Figure 12). Feminist economists and anthropologists have critiqued conventional concepts of economic production as obscuring the crucial role of socially-reproductive work such as birthing, elder care, housework, and the ongoing construction and maintenance of community ties (Narotzky 1997, 159). Our conceptions of production must, then, make visible all ways in which livelihood goods and services are produced. Regarding production relationships and processes, we can ask questions

such as: how is work organized (home-based, Fordist assembly line, just-in-time industrial production, networked, etc.)? How, and by whom, is production work managed (direct democracy, elected management, appointed management, despotic ruler, etc.)? How is surplus appropriation organized (capitalist, feudal, slave, independent, communal)? Who owns the means of production (individuals, family, private group, shareholders, employees, workers, consumers, etc.)? What is the geography of this ownership? What kinds of processes are used in production and what are the costs, effects, consequences of these processes? Who bears the costs? Who benefits? And finally, what is production for? For sale? For trade? For community use?

<b>(RE)PRODUCTION</b>					
<b>Organization of Work</b>	<b>Management of Work</b>	<b>Organization of Surplus</b>	<b>Ownership of Means</b>	<b>Geography of Ownership</b>	<b>Vectors of Production</b>
Assembly line Workshop Home-based Just-in-time Networked	Direct democracy Representative democracy Hierarchical Despotic	Capitalist Feudal Slave Independent Communal	Individual Private group Family Shareholders Employees (stock) Workers Consumers Municipality State Federal Nonprofit Hybrid	Local Regional State/Province National International Multinational Mixed	Market (multiple forms) State Household Community Individual

**Figure 12: (Re)production As a Key Category of Economic Relationship.**

Transfer (Figure 13). This is simply an alternative term for the category that Gibson-Graham call "transaction" and refers to the various ways in which production and consumption are linked-- how things move (or not, as in the case of self-provisioning)

from one "moment" to another.<sup>111</sup> Here it may be useful to draw on (and further elaborate) Polanyi in identifying differences and overlaps of forms of motion, with locational movements understood geographically and appropriational movements broken out into sub-categories of ownership, control and use. and in naming key patterns of transaction. We might also invoke Polanyi's forms of integration, adding gifts and theft to the list and specifying exchange not as a "market" transaction *per se*, but as any form of transaction in which the mediation of a value signifier transforms use-value into a commensurate exchange-value.

TRANSFER			
Movement	Mediation	Pattern	Relation to Base
Locational (geographic)  Appropriational - Ownership - Control - Use	Unmediated Good(s) Currency - National/local - Backed/unbacked - Units (time, other) - etc.	Gift Reciprocity Theft Redistribution Exchange - Personal, Negotiated Price - Personal, Price-Making - Anonymous, Price-Making - Local or nonlocal?	Base-Building Debasing Base Changing

**Figure 13: Transfer As a Key Category of Economic Relationship.**

Consumption (Figure 14). Narotzky points out that consumption is often understood as a simple act, located at the end of the economic cycle, performed by individuals and households (1997, 101). Quite the contrary, she argues: consumption (or "use") must be seen as a social process bound up with and manifest in multiple forms of

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<sup>111</sup> I prefer "transfer" because it does not imply a two-way movement in the way that "transaction" seems to suggest. There may, however, be no "best" term for this category, since each possible name I have explored (allocation, distribution, transaction, transfer, etc.) seems to carry some specificity that eclipses differences within this general economic "moment."

social organization. There is, in other words, a diverse economy of consumption. We can ask, in this category, question about who consumes, what they consume, where they engage in this consumption, and what the various forms of organized consumption might be in a given context. Households, buying clubs, firms, consumer cooperatives, prisons and governments are all examples (by far not exhaustive) of diverse forms of consumer organization that operate on very different principles, practices and value systems.

CONSUMPTION	
Organization of Consumption	Mode of Consumption
Individual	Accumulation
Family	- Wealth
Collective household	- Power
Buying-club	- Prestige
Consumer cooperative	Storage
State	Waste
Coercive (prison)	Investment
	Subsistence

**Figure 14: Consumption As a Key Category of Economic Relationship.**

Surplus (Figure 15). With regard to surplus, it is useful to make visible multiple, distinct (i.e., not necessarily or essentially linked) points of decision or organization. First, is surplus generated? Second, in what form is it generated and/or realized? Does it take money form, material goods form, energy form (etc.)? Third, who appropriates it? Fourth, to whom or where does it get distributed (investment, compost, waste, care for children or elders, personal excess consumption, etc.)? And fifth, once distributed, what happens to it? Where does it get invested, composted, wasted, shared, and with whom?



SURPLUS			
Form	Appropriation	Distribution	Use
Money Goods Time Waste products	Owners Producers Community State others	Owners Producers Community Society State others	Accumulation Storage Subsistence Reinvestment Sharing (Gift) Waste

**Figure 15: Surplus As a Key Category of Economic Relationship.**

Waste (Figure 16). While waste may be considered (and sometimes is) a form of surplus, it may merit separate treatment as a category. It is, to be sure, a large and often neglected category in contemporary economics and its creation and disposition has much bearing on our relationships with the more-than-human world as well as with issues of environmental justice. It can be investigated at any point of an economic chain, since--in the form of entropy, at least--it is an essential dimension of all action. Is waste created? If so, in what forms? This opens up an important distinction, for example, between what we might call "useful waste" (or "garbage") and "absolute waste" (or "trash"): in the former case, waste is produced in a form (compostable material, for example) that can be re-invested--a form of useful surplus--in life processes; in the latter case, waste is effectively useless and even dangerous and must simply be stored or mitigated. This is precisely the type of waste often confronted by many community organizations in struggles against the siting of toxic dumps and incinerators.

WASTE			
Form	Destination	Who Decides?	Who Pays?
Useful (organic) waste	Recycling/composting	Owner	Owner
Useful (inorganic) waste	Dump	Producer	Producer
Absolute waste	Other	Community	Community
Toxic waste		State	State
		Other	Other

**Figure 16: Waste As a Key Category of Economic Relationship.**

Governance (Figure 17). In the ontology of conventional RED, economic governance is reduced to the question of "the market" versus "the state." The state is viewed as the site of active governance, the originator of policy, legal boundaries and constraints and general forms of support, integration and enforcement between and among various economic actors. Markets are understood as a more "free"--that is, spontaneous, unconstrained, and natural--form of coordination between producers and consumers. Both sides of this ontology deserve strong interrogation and reformulation.

The state is certainly a site of active governance practice, but to locate such practice exclusively in this site through a discourse that links state with *regulation* and market with *freedom* is to actively hide all of the other spaces of governance that are spread out across multiple dimensions of social life. Indeed, it might be the case that the essentialized linkage between state and governance is a key ideological edifice supporting a notion of democracy as primarily a practice of engaging the state (or, even more narrowly, of electing people to enact that engagement). This effectively removes democratic action from the site of economic relations, including from questions of the ownership and management of firms. It is in this sense that governance must be de-linked from an exclusive relation to the state to become an active question in *all* economic sites.

On the market side, while it is certainly the case that market interactions form a crucial dimension of certain forms of economic coordination, it is problematic to confuse a form of exchange with processes and structures of governance. Markets, I suggest, should be understood quite specifically as modes of exchange in which a supply crowd and a demand crowd meet to trade goods and/or services through the medium of a culturally-shared "universal" equivalent. Markets can be located in specific places where buyers and sellers meet face-to-face (as in the traditional *marketplace*) or they can be non-local networks in which a more anonymous exchange is mediated by multiple institutions over diverse spatialities. In either case, the question of how markets are governed as forms of coordination is *distinct*: who enters markets, what is sold, how exchanges are mediated, what kinds of currencies are accepted, how disputes are resolved, how long windows for specific exchanges will last, and, perhaps most importantly, who makes these decisions and how, are best understood as moments of economic *governance*.

Governance must, therefore, be seen as a generalized category of actions spanning all "moments" of economic life. There is no governance or coordination separate from specific processes of human beings (and perhaps others as well) engaging in decision-making processes regarding how relationships should and will be structured over time and space, and these processes do and must take place in and between the realms of production, transfer, consumption, surplus appropriation and distribution, and interfaces between human institutions and other dimensions of creation.

GOVERNANCE			
Organizational Level	Participation	Decision-Making	Enforcement
Family	Exclusive	Direct democracy	Social sanctions
Collective group	Inclusive	Representation	Incentives
Municipality	All stakeholders	Appointed	Police/military
State	(etc).	Despotic	Vigilante
Nation		None	None
International			
Network			
Firm			

**Figure 17: Governance As a Key Category of Economic Relationship.**

This modified and expanded diverse economies framework may also be usefully represented in the form of a circle or, as some have called it, an "egg" (Figure 18). This circular representation is dangerous in the ways that it might invoke a sense of "the economy" as a unified system or a bounded space, as well as in the ways that it separates the various economic processes into linear (albeit circularly connected) movements. Yet with such a representation in hand, we might usefully return to Gudeman's formulation of the commons and ask how such a concept links with this broader diverse economies perspective. I suggest that we experiment with thinking about the diverse economy circle as an image of *the circulation and articulation of value practices*. Each "moment" of economic life depicted here is a point of ethical decision, a site of (potential) agreement or struggle over the ways in which interrelationship and interdependency will be made manifest. By viewing these points as simultaneously independent--in the sense that they are not wholly determined by the other sites, but are rather "overdetermined" by all sites including (quite importantly) the agency of those directly involved--and potentially

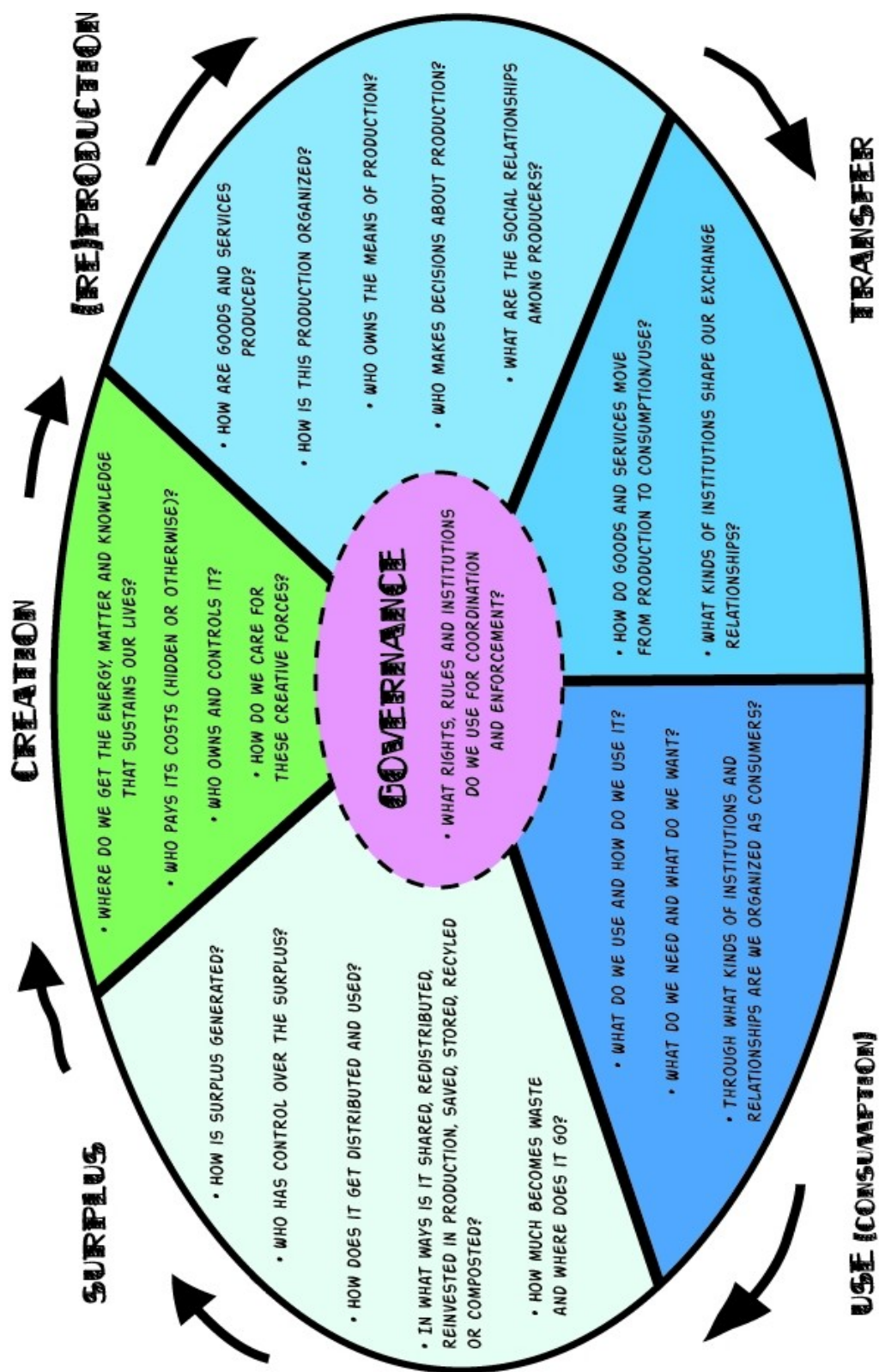


Figure 18: A Circular Diverse Economy.

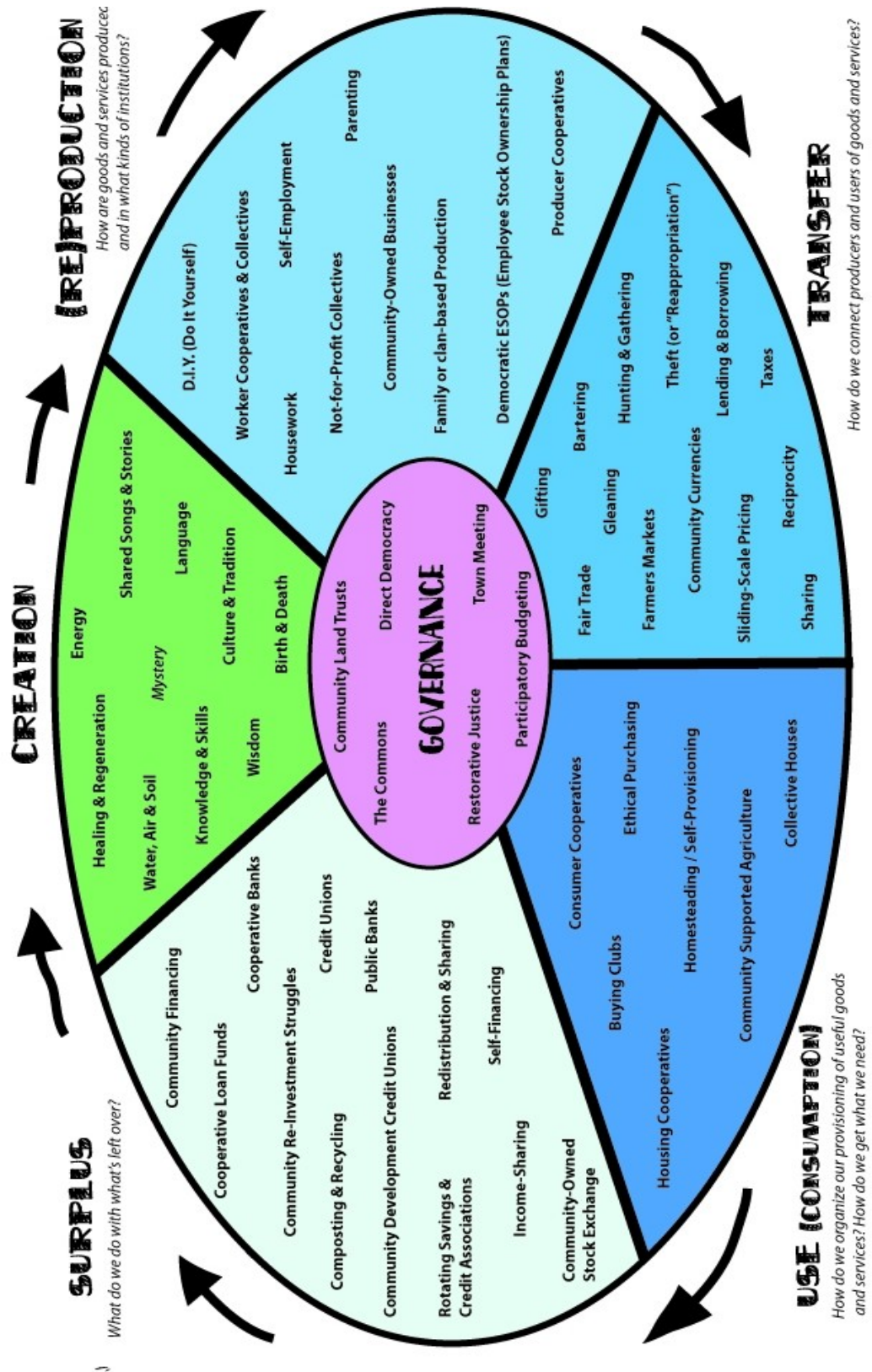


Figure 19: A Circular Diverse Economy With Example Initiatives.

interconnected, we might be able to begin a process of tracing the ways in which they are (and can yet become) more strategically constitutive of each other.

We can say this differently by returning to Polanyi. While we must view economic relations as always constituted "in the moment" at the site of their enactment, we must also be able to account for and trace the ways in which economic negotiations become habits, patterns, and accrete over time into durable institutions. A key dimension of this process is the integration of multiple "moments" of economic practice into chains of interrelationship. These are the beads-on-a-string, the articulations of multiple forms of value practice into--quite literally--*value chains*. It is the construction of such chains that enables us (albeit perhaps somewhat problematically) to talk about a "solidarity economy," a "cooperative economy" or a "green economy": these are all articulations of multiple practices at distinct locations in economic life that enact *similar ethical aspirations*.

Here we might enlist de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford's notion of the "circulation of the common" (2010). Building on an understanding of commons quite similar to (although less developed than) that of Gudeman, they suggest that a key strategy in struggles against the alienating (I would say *uncommoning*) relations of capitalist commodity exchange is the ongoing process of making, identifying and *linking* commons. "The circuit of the common," they write, "traces how...collectivities--which we term association--organize shared resources into productive ensembles that create more commons, which in turn provide the basis for more associations" (2010, 16). The articulated elements of the economic hegemony that we seek to depose may be thought



of, in this sense, as the circulation of the uncommons, the linkage of processes that sever interrelationship or cover over its ethical dimensions. What we struggle to build on local, regional and global scales instead is the circulation of commons: the linkage of relationships in which ethical interdependency is "acknowledged and enlarged" (Gibson-Graham 2008, 156). "To speak of the circulation of the common," write de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford, "is to propose connecting...commons to reinforce and enable one another, creating a circuit in which the common goods and services produced by associations at one point in the circuit provide inputs and resources for associations at another, making what Gibson-Graham call a 'generative commons'" (2010, 17). How, for example, might worker cooperatives more effectively link with consumer cooperatives utilizing local, time-based currencies? This is the kind of strategic envisioning process advocated by "solidarity economy" organizers in various parts of the world seeking to build "solidarity chains" across multiple economic sectors and organizational forms (Arruda 2008; Lewis 2007; Mance 2007; Miller 2006; 2010).

The political project of building other (regional) economies cannot rest on the cultivation of multiple diverse economic value practices alone. Politics, as Laclau and Mouffe have shown, must be enacted as a process of articulating these value practices together in ways that are mutually-constitutive and in ways that constitute an "antagonistic bloc" in the face of the current economic hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe 2001).<sup>112</sup> We must seek (with Gudeman) to ask questions about who constitutes our

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<sup>112</sup>Does this mean that we must seek a fight? No, but neither does it mean the contrary. We must build our alternatives as organizing projects, continually seeking to enlist more allies (human and nonhuman) into value chains that negotiate, struggle over and embody ethics of cooperation, care, justice, dignity and democracy (among others). It means that we must fill all available spaces with such practices and chains, and it means that when we arrive at walls, barriers, we must either climb them, enlist them, tear them down or wait for them to crumble. There are no strategic necessities, only options.



communities and what commons we make and share; we must wrestle (through Plumwood) over ways in which one commons might be built at the expense of another and how such a relation might be transformed; we must identify (with Gibson-Graham) the key coordinates of ethical negotiation from which commons are made (or unmade) and learn to see the diversity of practices and sites available for enactment of different values; and we must work (with Polanyi) to institutionalize new value practices through linkages across economic sites, seeking new forms and patterns of integration. It is through work such as this that new discourses of economy, new economic ontologies, will have a chance at being not only exciting performances of thought and imagination, but materially-significant and viable processes of human and more-than-human collectives to make new economies *real*.

## CONCLUSION: PATHWAYS FOR NEXT STEPS

If this conclusion is more like a Chapter 4 longing to be born than a summarization of what has come before, it is because the ontological explorations of this thesis have been merely a prelude to work that is yet to come. The proliferation of questions and points of negotiation and decision identified in my engagements with Polanyi, Gudeman and Gibson-Graham in Chapter 3 are not meant to remain on paper or to be explored only (or even primarily) through further book-based research. They are questions that I believe can animate on-the-ground processes of participatory regional development in which people come together to collectively investigate the contours of their local and regional economies--seeing with new eyes inspired by new economic ontologies--and to build on these investigations with work of collective visioning, planning and organizing. To reiterate an idea presented in Chapter 2, the alternative discourses explored in this thesis *perform* only to the extent that they assemble new collectives of actants to *do work together in/as the world*. Their performative power lies not in the discourses themselves (as some inherent "performativity") but in the ways that these discourses might become feelings and ideas that activate bodies to make real connections and build worlds together. For any idea to make a difference, someone must, at some point, put down the book and experiment with performing that idea into being.

Plum Creek's development plan (described in the introduction to Chapter 1) would not have been a politically-viable project, I believe, if its advocates were not able to draw upon the empty space of agency and possibility that has been constituted among

communities in northern Maine by discourses of conventional RED. It is not the absence of alternatives that makes the construction of vast luxury resorts appear as the only option; it is the discourse of economy that makes alternatives *invisible*. It is the absence of an *ontology of economy* that might enable people and communities to see and feel their own capacity to build on the practices of commoning that are already present in their places. The hypothesis that I would like to build upon in future (action) research is that processes of regional development that begin with work to *shift the ontological ground of economy* upon which communities build their work of planning and visioning can lead to substantively different kinds of economic aspirations, proposals and collective endeavors. Our work as academics, I believe, should be less about analyzing the objective conditions (possibilities, constraints, structural necessities, etc.) facing efforts for regional transformation and development and more about developing frameworks for thinking and feeling--conceptual technologies of identification--that can enable new spaces of possibility within which communities might ask their own questions, craft their own visions, and explore the limits of possibility with their own efforts and imaginations.

In this spirit, and in closing this thesis with an eye towards new openings, I would like to propose one possible direction for the further elaboration of alternative economic frameworks that could be mobilized to animate participatory regional development processes: a (radical) performative reformulation of "economic base theory." My explorations of this pathway will be necessarily brief and sketchy, suggesting only the general contours of concepts that remain to be developed into more robust tools for thinking and action.

Economic base theory (mentioned briefly in Chapter 1) is one of the most prominent and pervasive conceptual constructions in conventional regional economic development. In its simplest and most stripped-down form, it is a structural-explanatory approach to regional economics built on the proposition that economic growth (in its various guises, including job growth) is generated primarily through the production and sale of export goods beyond the boundaries of the region in question. Making and selling goods and services within a region is important, but cannot do more than circulate the same wealth throughout the economy. To grow, new wealth must be brought in from the outside. Export-based industries, then, are called "basic" industries, while those producing only (or primarily) for sale within the region are called "nonbasic" (or "dependent," since their well-being depends on the export firms) industries (Krikelas 1992; Maliza and Feser 1999). Regional economic developers utilizing economic base theory are likely to focus significant amounts of energy on developing, maintaining and attracting basic industries into a region.

This is, of course, an oversimplification of what has over time become a complex analytical tool, and there are many critiques that have been (and should yet be) made of the theory. I present it not to engage with the details of its history, application or theoretical nuance, or to levy another critique, but simply to provide a discursive background upon which to offer a very different take on the "economic base." More than riffing on the theme of conventional economic base theory, this is a complete rewrite inspired only by the performative possibilities evoked by the floating signifier of the "base" and by the question that it begs: what *is* the "economic base" of a region? How

might we perform this notion (very) differently? How might we think about this in light of notions of economic being-in-common, the community economy, the commons and our ethical responsibilities to account for our interrelationships? Gudeman's conceptualization of the commons--the *base*, in fact--lends itself quite well to such a project. I propose that we start here.

Let us begin by saying, then, that the *economic base* of a region is constituted in part by the various commons that its communities make and share . People in a region can engage, utilizing a framework similar to that offered by Gudeman (Figure 5 in Chapter 3), in a process of identifying elements of their base. As we have seen, such an investigation would also be a process of constituting the commons, of performatively *articulating a base into being* as a conscious realm of shared relationships and responsibilities. This is a very different base than that posed by export-theory: far from focusing on external income generation, this notion of the commons begins with a much more intuitive and reasonable assertion that what is most basic is *what sustains us*, and that what sustains us should be and become *common*, shared (in diverse and complex ways) among all.

A network of regional commons, however, does not fully articulate all that a given set of communities use and require for their sustenance. There are, as I have described in Chapter 3, at least two complexities that must be introduced into our notion of the commons: first, the fact that commons are only ever constituted as those portions of a community's livelihood practice and context that are *significant*, made *visible*, and consciously *shared* by that community. There are always, in other words, constitutive

interrelationships in a community's place that have not been *commoned*. Second, and related to this, is Plumwood's crucial notion of "shadow places," written into a concept of *shadow commons*. In an era of "dematerialization," the livelihoods of people in many communities and regions are constituted in a significant way by places, relationships, commons-of-others that are not located in their geographic places. This is what Plumwood describes as "the dissociation of the affective place (the place of and in the mind, attachment and identification, political effectiveness, family history, ancestral place) from the economic place" (2008, 141). This is the economy of the *uncommons*.

Plumwood proposes, in the face of such a reality, that we develop a more critical conception of place as all "those parts of the earth that 'grow you', that support your life" (2008, 146). In other words, she advocates for a sense of place *that is not necessarily coextensive with the geographical locations in which we live*. This is a crucial idea. It suggests that the definition of "base" as "commons" (as I hinted at above) is not enough; it suggests, rather, that the question of our "base" is indeterminate outside of a specific context; that a base cannot be assumed (as, for example, being coextensive with a local commons) but must, rather, be *traced*. That which sustains us might be in many locations, and some of those places might be other peoples' commons.

Because, however, the term "place" has collected such a dense tangle of associations with location (and many of them positive), I wish to hold on to Plumwood's proposal but with a shifted vocabulary. Inspired by Gibson, Cahill and McKay's (2010) work, I propose that we develop a notion of "*habitat*" as *all of the constitutive interrelationships that sustain our lives, local and nonlocal, known and unknown*. What

Plumwood calls "denied or shadow places" (2008, 146), I would call *denied habitats* and *shadow places*; that is, I would recognize that it is the constitutive interrelationship--the *habitat*--that is denied, and it is the place --the geography lived by the inhabitants of that habitat's location--that becomes a shadow.

What I am proposing here, then, is a tripartite distinction between *place*, *habitat* and *commons* as a way to conceptualize a region's economic base (Figure 20). Place is the storied locale, the lived daily geography of a community or region. Habitat is the web of constitutive interrelationships that make the lives of people (human and nonhuman) in a region possible: it is not a location-specific category but a *relational* category and, for many humans at least, is spread out among numerous shadow places across the planet. Commons consists of those elements of both place and habitat that a community *makes common*, produces and sustains as a consciously-shared pool of resources and set of relationships for which that it takes caring responsibility. This set of distinctions enables

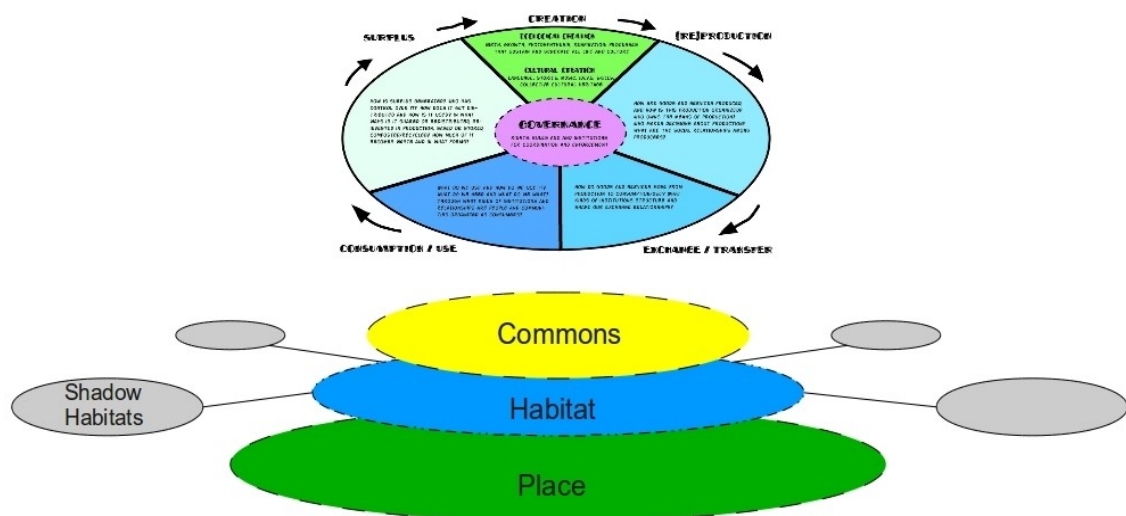


Figure 20: Place, Habitat and Commons As Economic Relations.

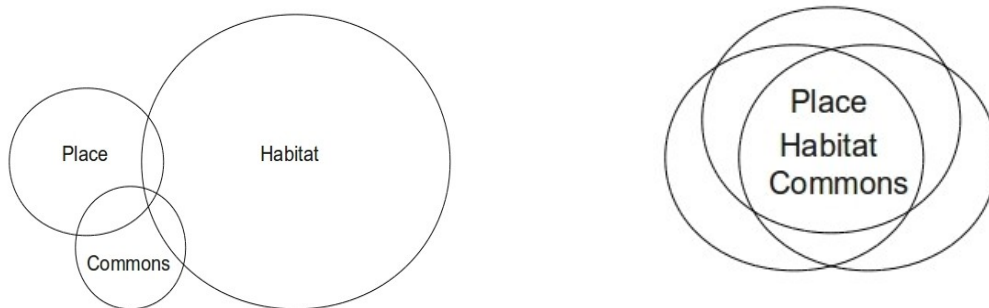
us to ask useful questions about the relationships between these different "levels" of economic being-in-common. How coextensive is a community's habitat with its place? Where are a region's shadow habitats located? How coextensive are a region's commons with its place and its habitat? In what ways do (or might) communities in a region work to make common more of their (local and nonlocal) habitats? What might this look like?

While this set of concepts shares an ethical impulse with the analytical tool of the "ecological footprint", it is also distinct. The ecological footprint is a general tool with which to measure the size and scale of the impact that a given individual, institution or population has on planetary ecosystems. By estimating, for example, that the average U.S. citizen uses the equivalent of 10.3 hectares of land-based productive capacity in a year--compared, for example, with the average Pakistani who uses 0.9 hectares--we can create a *sense* of the extent to which we outsource our habitats to other places (Wackernagel and Rees 1996; Wackernagel et al. 1999). But the ecological footprint remains an abstraction in terms of the geography of this outsourcing. We do not use 10.3 "general" hectares, we draw our sustenance from the cutting of specific trees in specific forests, from the harvesting of specific crops in specific fields by specific workers. We outsource our toxic waste to communities that have names, that make and share commons, whose economic possibilities are forcibly foreclosed by our cultivation of ours. By tracing the distinct geographies of our places, our habitats and our commons, by asking questions about the ways in which they do and do not overlap, and by exploring the ethical responsibilities involved in these relations, we might begin to build more



specific and concrete supportive linkages between projects of alternative regional development in many places.

We might approach a regional development process, then, through a series of steps. First, we could trace the contours of our place. Where do we live? What is our region? Here, we define the boundaries of our initial inquiry, the outlines of our starting point. Second, we could attempt mappings of our habitats. This is no easy task with habitats scattered about across the globe like an uneven spread of buckshot, but we might begin with a particular sector: where does our food come from, for example? Third, a mapping of our commons can begin to open up critical questions about relationships.



**Figure 21: Two Patterns of Place, Habitat and Commons**

How coextensive are our commons and our habitats (Figure 21)? This is particularly salient in places where commons are increasingly detached from both places and habitats; where the commons made and shared by a community is on TV, online, in a musical "scene," often wholly disconnected from specific locations and sources of sustenance.<sup>113</sup>

Gibson-Graham's coordinates of ethical negotiation (described in Chapter 3) might be

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<sup>113</sup> The point of conventional RED has been, in some sense, to enable people to outsource our habitats and to constitute commons that are less and less connected to the central interrelations that constitute our lives and places. This is the freedom of "development"--the ability to become uncommon to the world in which we live.

helpful in this process of asking questions about relationships between places, commons and habitats.<sup>114</sup> Finally, we might use our overlapping maps to engage in more specific discussions about the kinds of ethical interrelationships that we want to create and sustain, and to mobilize diverse economies frameworks as tools for choosing the specific kinds of practices, institutions and linkages (values chains) that could enable such interrelationships to be realized.

May the conversations proliferate, the possibilities grow, and the living, dreaming and loving struggles continue!

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<sup>114</sup> We might decide, for example, that global solidarity must begin with a process of *making common* all of our habitats in collaboration with those who have already *commoned* them.

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