

## Chapter 1

# Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for “Other Worlds”<sup>1</sup>

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### **Introduction: Diverse Economies as a Performative Ontological Project**

As graduate students in the 1970s, we were schooled to see social scientific work as a political intervention. Joining with other radical economic geographers to theorize capitalist restructuring, we focused on the nature and dynamics of a globalizing economy with the goal of “understanding the world in order to change it.” This familiar Marxist prescription turned out to be difficult to follow, especially when it came to changing the world; our theories seemed to cement an emerging world in place rather than readying it for transformation. But when we encountered post-structuralism in the late 1980s, our interventionist view of social knowledge was re-energized. Untethered from the obligation to represent what was “really going on out there,” we began to ask how theory and epistemology could advance what we wanted to do in the world. Tentatively at first, we dropped our structural approach to social explanation and adopted an anti-essentialist approach, theorizing the contingency of social outcomes rather than the unfolding of structural logics. This gave us (and the world) more room to move, enlarging the space of the ethical and political (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). At the same time, we embraced a performative orientation to knowledge rather than a realist or reflective one. This acknowledged the activism inherent in knowledge production and installed a new kind of scholarly responsibility (Butler 1993; Callon 2009; Law and Urry 2004). “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?” These became the guiding questions of our research practice.

Our goal as academics was still to understand the world in order to change it, but with a post-structuralist twist: to change our understanding *is* to change the world in small and sometimes major ways (Law and Urry 2004: 391). Our specific goal was to contribute to

building alternative economies by producing a discourse that highlighted the variety of transactions, labors, enterprises, finances, and ownership relations in which people engaged to secure their material survival. But before we could embark on a project of theorizing economic diversity, we had to confront the understandings of capitalism that stood in our way. In *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (1996/2006) we addressed familiar representations of capitalism as an obdurate structure or system. We argued that the performative effect of these representations was to dampen and discourage non-capitalist initiatives because power was assumed to be concentrated in capitalism and largely absent from other forms of economy. Consequently, those interested in non-capitalist economic projects pulled back because their dreams seemed unrealizable, at least in their lifetimes. Capitalism was thus strengthened, its dominance performed.

As a means of dislocating the hegemonic framing of capitalism, we drew attention to the common and problematic conflation of markets/commodities/capitalist accumulation. We adopted the entry point of class and specified, following Marx and Resnick and Wolff (1987), a number of class processes (independent, feudal, slave, communal, and capitalist). Recognition of these coexisting ways of producing, appropriating, and distributing surplus made capitalism slightly less formidable. It appeared now as a set of practices scattered over a landscape: in families, neighborhoods, households, organizations, states, and private, public, and social enterprises. Capitalist dominance became an open question rather than an initial presumption.

From the outset, feminist economic analysis provided support and raw materials for our emerging vision of a diverse economic field. Over the past 20 years feminist analysts have demonstrated that non-market transactions and unpaid household work (both by definition non-capitalist) constitute 30 to 50% of economic activity in both rich and poor countries (Ironmonger 1996). Such quantitative representations exposed the discursive violence entailed in speaking of “capitalist” economies and lent credibility to projects of representing economy differently.

Since publication of *The End of Capitalism*, we have been less concerned with disrupting the performative effects of capitalist representation than with putting forward a new economic ontology that could contribute to novel economic performances. Broadening out from Marxism and feminism, we conceived the economic landscape as a proliferative space of difference, drawing eclectically on economic anthropology, economic sociology, institutional economics, area studies, and studies of the underground and informal economies. We were buoyed in our efforts by growing interest from geographers and others in the immense variety of economic relations, both good and bad, contributing to social life. Figure 1.1 categorizes such variety into five groupings: enterprise (including all the non-capitalist and capitalist enterprises that produce, appropriate, and distribute surplus in different ways); labor (including wage labor, alternatively compensated labor, and unpaid labor); property (including private property, alternative private and open access property); transactions (including all the market, alternative market, and non-market transactions that circulate goods and services); and finance (including mainstream, alternative mainstream finance as well as non-market financial transactions).

This framing is open-ended, and could potentially include other dimensions of difference such as relationships to nature. When specified for any particular locality or sector, the entries will vary from those shown here (see Gibson-Graham 2006; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy forthcoming).

Figure 1.1 is susceptible to a number of different readings. Those working with a structural ontology, for example, might construe the lower cells as subordinate or complementary to

ENTERPRISE	LABOR	PROPERTY	TRANSACTIONS	FINANCE
<b>CAPITALIST</b>	<b>WAGE</b>	<b>PRIVATE</b>	<b>MARKET</b>	<b>MAINSTREAM MARKET</b>
<b>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</b> State owned Environmentally responsible Socially responsible Non-profit	<b>ALTERNATIVE PAID</b> Self-employed Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for welfare	<b>ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE</b> State-managed assets Customary (clan) land Community land trusts Indigenous knowledge (Intellectual Property)	<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b> Fair trade Alternative currencies Underground market Barter	<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b> Cooperative Banks Credit unions Community-based financial institutions Micro-finance
<b>NON-CAPITALIST</b> Worker cooperatives Sole proprietorships Community enterprise Feudal Slave	<b>UNPAID</b> Housework Volunteer Self-provisioning Slave labor	<b>OPEN ACCESS</b> Atmosphere International Waters Open source IP Outer Space	<b>NON-MARKET</b> Household sharing Gift giving Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, piracy, poaching	<b>NON-MARKET</b> Sweat equity Family lending Donations Interest-free loans

Note: The items in each cell are only examples of what could be included. The figure should be read down the columns, not across the rows.

**Figure 1.1** A diverse economy.

Source: Authors

capitalism, which seems to be in a position of dominance in the top line. From an ethical and performative reading, on the other hand, the diagram is not a window on a transcendent ontology but simply a technology for performing a different economy, bringing into visibility a diversity of economic activities as objects of inquiry and activism. In this reading, the diverse economies research program is not a realist epistemological project for knowing existing objects but a performative ontological project. Its purpose is to bring new economies into being.

Our research has begun performing different economies using this diagram as an imaginative starting place for inventorying. Action research projects like ours, though, face the challenge of credibility. For the activities and organizations we identify are typically not recognized as a source of dynamism or as the so-called driver or motor of change. In actuality, however, these ostensibly “marginal” economic practices and forms of enterprise are more prevalent and account for more hours worked, and/or more value produced, than the capitalist sector. Most are globally extensive, with potentially more impact on social well-being than capitalism. To support this claim, we offer a brief and selective inventory of such globally local activities.

- Non-market transactions and unpaid labor performed in households around the world centered on the care of others and the direct provision of material well-being account for up to 50% of economic activity in both rich and poor countries.
- Consumer, producer, and worker coop enterprises organized around an ethic of solidarity distribute their economic surplus to members and the wider community.
- There are movements that place care of the environment, landscapes, and ways of life at the center of their economic activity such as Community Supported Agriculture.
- There are a growing number of networks promoting local and complementary currencies helping people to satisfy needs directly and constituting community differently.
- There is a social economy (sometimes called the Third Sector) made up of cooperatives, mutual societies, voluntary organizations, foundations, social enterprises, and many non-profits that put social objectives above business objectives.
- Informal international financial networks supply credit or gifts directly and democratize development funding. Migrant remittances rival the size of foreign direct investment in developing countries and exhibit much more steady growth. (Bridi 2005)

Many more economic activities and movements could be included in this list, including squatter, slumdweller, landless and co-housing movements, the global eco-village movement, fair trade, economic self-determination, the relocalization movement, community-based resource management, and others. But their status as marginal and unconvincing is difficult to budge. It is here that we confront a choice: to continue to marginalize (by ignoring or disparaging) the plethora of hidden and alternative economic activities that contribute to social well-being and environmental regeneration, or to make them the focus of our research and teaching in order to make them more “real”, more credible, more viable as objects of policy and activism.

The latter is the performative ontological project of “diverse economies.”

### **Becoming Different Academic Subjects**

We argue that the diverse economy framing opens up opportunities for theorizing and producing radically heterogeneous and dynamic economies. It also highlights an existing economic world waiting to be selectively (re)performed. But a problem remains. We might need

to become different kinds of thinkers to perform diverse economies into existence. As theoreticians we are trained to be detached from the world so that we can penetrate the veil of common understanding and expose the root causes that govern the phenomenal world. This academic stance implies skepticism and negativity. So, where does this leave us as thinkers whose goal is to nurture an environment for hopeful, inchoate experiments?

Bruno Latour expresses a similar disquiet when he likens the practice of critical theory to the thinking of popular conspiracy theorists:

In both cases . . . it is the same appeal to powerful agents hidden in the dark acting always consistently, continuously, relentlessly. Of course, we in the academy like to use more elevated causes – society, discourse, knowledge-slash-power, fields of forces, empires, capitalism – while conspiracists like to portray a miserable bunch of greedy people with dark intents, but I find something troublingly similar in the structure of explanation, in the first movement of disbelief and, then, in the wheeling of causal explanations coming out of the deep dark below. (2004: 229)

In more psychoanalytic language, Eve Sedgwick identifies this as the paranoid motive in social theorizing. Paranoia marshals every site and event into the same fearful order, with the goal of minimizing surprise (Sedgwick 2003). Everything comes to mean the same thing, usually something large and threatening (like neoliberalism, or globalization, or capitalism, or empire).

The paranoid stance yields a particular kind of theory, “strong” theory with an embracing reach and a reductive field of meaning (Sedgwick 2003). Consequently, experimental forays into building new economies are likely to be dismissed as “capitalism in another guise” or as an alternative already “coopted.” They are judged as inadequate before they are explored in all their complexity. While such a reaction may be an appropriate critical response, it affirms an ultimately essentialist, usually structural vision, reinforcing what is dominant.

If our goal as thinkers is the proliferation of different economies, we may need to adopt a different orientation toward understanding and the world. We may need to become different kinds of thinkers, ones who can energize and support “other economies.” This will inevitably mean changing ourselves and re-training our thinking faculties. The co-implicated process of changing ourselves / changing our thinking / changing the world is an ethico-political practice. It is an *ethical* practice because it involves a choice to be / act / or think in a certain way (Varela 1992). And it is *political* because it involves a decision to act to transform the world, despite recognition of a contingent and uncertain universe (Torfing 1999).

How might those of us interested in economic diversity choose to think and theorize new types of economy so that our efforts don’t undermine the new but become a condition of its possibility? Once again Eve Sedgwick shows us the way. What if we were to accept that the goal of thinking is not to extend knowledge by confirming what we already know, that the world is a place of domination and oppression? What if instead we thought about openings and strategic possibilities in the cracks? As a means of yielding something new, Sedgwick suggests reducing the reach of thinking, localizing its purview, practicing a “weak” form of theory. The practice of weak theorizing involves refusing to extend explanation too widely or deeply, refusing to predict too much. Weak theory couldn’t know that social experiments are doomed to fail or are destined to reinforce dominance; it couldn’t tell us that the world economy will never be transformed by the disorganized proliferation of local projects.

Strong theory has produced our current powerlessness by positing unfolding logics and structures that limit politics. Weak theory could de-exoticize power, enabling us to explore

its many mundane forms. A differentiated landscape of force, constraint, energy, and freedom would open up (Allen 2003), allowing us to tap into the positive energies available.

Weak theory could be undertaken with a reparative motive that welcomes surprise, tolerates coexistence, and cares for the new, providing a welcoming environment for the objects of our thought (Gibson-Graham 1994). It could foster a “love of the world,” as Hannah Arendt suggests (Young-Bruehl 2004), rather than masterful knowing or moralistic detachment. It could draw on the pleasures of friendliness, trust, and companionable connection. There could be a greater scope for invention and playfulness, enchantment, and exuberance (Bennett 2001; Gibson-Graham 2001).

The diverse economies diagram in Figure 1.1 provides a weak theory of an economy. Rather than positing an economy defined and driven by the integration and dominance of the top cells of each column, Figure 1.1 draws from a range of economic discourses a proliferation of categories and concepts that each make claim to being part of an economy. As a listing of heterogeneous economic practices, the figure contains minimal critical theoretical content – there are no implied relations of subordination or domination between the cells – but there is an important theoretical recognition of presence and contribution. Little more than description, this figure is a simple but powerful technology that reconstitutes the ground upon which we can perform a different economy, which is how we have used it in our participatory action research.

The choice to create weak theory about diverse economies is a political/ethical decision that influences what kind of worlds we can imagine and create. Many other social scientists understand their research choices as ordained by the world itself, by the stark realities that impose themselves on consciousness and demand investigation. In economic geography, for example, the dominant topic of research over the past decade or more has been neoliberalism and neoliberal capitalist globalization. This has been represented as needing study for the apparently self-evident reason that “it is the most important process of our age, transforming geographies worldwide.” Some leading proponents of neoliberalism studies have begun to express concern about where this line of research is headed (Castree 2006; Larner 2003), but few see themselves as making an ethical choice to participate in *constituting* neoliberalism. Law and Urry point to the ultimately destructive “innocence” of this position:

. . . to the extent social science conceals its performativity from itself it is pretending to an innocence that it cannot have. And to the extent that it enacts methods that look for or assume certain structural stabilities, it enacts those stabilities *while interfering with other realities* . . . (2004: 404, emphasis ours)

Taking Law and Urry’s point to heart, we can identify the problem with strong theories of neoliberal capitalist globalization. Their performative effect interferes with, makes non-credible (Santos 2004), and denies legitimacy or autonomy to diverse non-capitalist economic practices already here. It closes down the open futures that are waiting to be performatively enacted.

In the face of what has become “normal science” for economic geography – studies of neoliberal this and that – many geographers are making other choices, contributing to new performances by bringing economic diversity to light (see, for example, Leyshon, Lee, and Williams 2003; Gibson-Graham 2008). Through devoting academic attention to hidden and alternative economic practices this work has constituted new objects of study and investigation, making them visible as potential objects of policy and politics. This is the most basic

sense in which knowledge is performative. In the remainder of this chapter, we outline some of the practices of thinking and research that advance the ontological project of “diverse economies.”

## The Ethics of Thinking

In our discussion of the academic subject, we have advocated an open, concerned, and connected stance and a readiness to explore rather than judge, giving what is nascent and not fully formed some room to move and grow. We have also broached the power and responsibility that devolves upon scholars once we acknowledge the performativity of our teaching and research. When ontology becomes the effect rather than the ground of knowledge, we lose the comfort and safety of being passive observers of “reality” who seek to capture accurately what already exists; interdependence and creativity are thrust upon us as we become implicated in the very existence of the worlds that we research. Every question about what to study and how to study it becomes an ethical opening; every decision entails profound responsibility. The whole notion of academic ethics is simultaneously enlarged and transformed.

Ethics in our understanding involves not only continually choosing to feel, think, and act in particular ways but also, following Foucault, the embodied practices that bring principles into action. In our own diverse economies research, these practices include thinking techniques that actualize our ethical stances. Here we highlight three techniques of *doing thinking* that geographers (and others) use as ethical subjects to realize economic possibilities:

- ontological reframing to produce the ground of possibility;
- re-reading to uncover or excavate the possible;
- creativity to generate actual possibilities where none formerly existed.

Each of the examples we discuss could be seen as performing new worlds as well as new academic subjects.

### *Ontological Reframing: Producing the Ground of Possibility*

We are interested in ontological reframings that increase our space of decision and room to move as political subjects by enlarging the field from which the unexpected can emerge. Our examples involve taking what is usually seen as a structural given (a national economy, a world city) and reframing it as an ethical project; that is, actively choosing how to know and what to create through this knowledge.

Timothy Mitchell’s research is on the materialization of the modern idea of “the economy” through the repeated mobilization of mid-twentieth-century technologies of calculation and representation (2008). For Mitchell “the economy” is not a transcendental given that is merely revealed through economic theory. It is instead a project, or set of projects, that has been stabilized through measurement and accounting practices, through the “science” of economics, through economic policy and monitoring, and through other practices and technologies (Mitchell 2008). Over time “the economy” is seen and comes to exist as a separate social sphere whose functionings can be known, analyzed, and recorded: “the economy” becomes reality.

In *Rule of Experts* Mitchell (2002) traces how a modern economy became materialized in Egypt, exemplifying how the discipline of economics (and perhaps also economic

geography?) is caught up in the process of producing the economy, creating a world where only certain kinds of facts survive (2008: 1119 drawing on Latour). His analysis of historical documents pertaining to the 1950s' land reform programs in Egypt shows that they describe a wide range of economic practices including "numerous non-capitalist elements" that made up agricultural life. Had these practices not been actively excluded from scrutiny, they could have become the "facts" of a different performance of economy (2002: 270). By identifying the repeated choices and performances that end up sedimenting durable economic structures in place, Mitchell opens up a space for ontological reframing. Without denying the power that these performances marshal, it becomes possible to theorize about the potential for alternative technologies to perform alternative economies.

Mitchell argues that "[t]he 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). Clearly new facts, generated by non-hegemonic economic projects, do come into being. We have only to look at the success of feminist economics and social economy scholarship that have constituted facts such as the hours of unpaid household labor performed, or the number of community interest enterprises that, in some national economies, are now collected as official statistics. The diverse economies research program can take heart from the performative effects of committing to the collection of these new facts and reshaping what constitutes the national economy.

Perhaps the most politically empowering ontological reframing is the move from a structural theory of determination to a vision of ethical actions with determining effects, as powerfully exemplified in Doreen Massey's (2004; 2005; 2007) work on "geographies of responsibility" and an "ethics of place beyond place." Conscious of the political decisions one makes as a theorist, Massey argues in *World City* (2007) for a re-imagining of London, moving away from the representation of a global city with imperial and financial dominance in an urban hierarchy to an understanding of the city as space of un-theorized global connections and local political possibilities. This shift relies on a reframed ontology of space and place:

Urban space is *relational*, not a mosaic of simply juxtaposed differences. This place, as many places, has to be conceptualised, not as a simple diversity, but as a meeting-place, of jostling, potentially conflicting, trajectories. It is set within, and internally constituted through, complex geometries of differential power. This implies an identity that is, internally, fractured and multiple. Such an understanding of place requires that conflicts are recognised, that positions are taken and that (political) choices are made. (2007: 89)

Massey imagines a city that is engaged in re-creating itself through ethical practices of counter-globalization, of reaching out to establish "relations with elsewhere" (p. 174). While accepting the responsibility of "this place's implications in the production of the global itself" (pp. 170–1), Massey's work explores the ethical projects of extending the local imagination to what is outside, enrolling an understanding of place "as generous and hospitable" (p. 172). Her ontological reframing releases London from its location in a known structure of power and allows for new strategies of connection to be activated.

Both Mitchell and Massey provide open research agendas which follow from abandoning the ontological privileging of systemic or structural determination. Their work does not suggest that we can remake the world easily or without significant resistance. We cannot ignore the power of past discourses and their materialization in durable technologies,



infrastructures, and behaviors. Nor can we sidestep our responsibility to those both within and beyond our place who have suffered for our relative well-being. But we can choose, as does Mitchell, to create new discourses and counter-technologies of economy and, along with Massey, to construct strategic forms of inter-place solidarity, bringing to the fore ways to make other worlds possible.

### *Reading for Difference: Excavating the Possible*

The second technique of thinking is reading for difference rather than dominance, a specific research practice that can be brought to bear on all kinds of subjects to uncover or excavate the possible. The theoretical importance of this deconstructive technique is highlighted by the queer reading of sexuality and gender that appreciates their wide diversity of biological, emotional, social, and cultural manifestations, not subordinating them to the binary hierarchies of heterosexual and homosexual, male and female (Sedgwick 1993; Butler 1993). In our own work, we have queered the economic landscape by reading it as differentiated along class lines (see especially Gibson-Graham, Resnick, and Wolff 2000; Gibson-Graham 2001). Our agenda is to destabilize the discourse of capitalocentrism that situates a wide range of economic practices and identities as either the same as, opposite to, a complement of, or contained within capitalism. In *Capital Marx* (1977) foregrounded the historical rise of capitalist class processes, which he differentiated against a background of non-capitalist (specifically feudal and primitive communist) class processes. Re-reading for difference, we bring the background to the foreground, representing all class processes as coexisting rather than marching in sequence through time. By collapsing the temporality inherent in Marx's analysis, we are able to highlight the many different ways in which surplus in its various forms is currently produced, appropriated, and distributed.

The strategy of making difference visible does not automatically produce new ways forward, but it can generate new possibilities and different strategies. Boaventura de Sousa Santos stresses the importance of recovering what has been rendered "non-credible" and "non-existent" by dominant modes of thought. The "sociology of absences," as Santos calls it, offers alternatives to hegemonic discourse; it creates the "conditions to enlarge the field of credible experiences," thus widening "the possibilities for social experimentation" (2004: 238–9). Our technique of reading for economic difference takes up Santos' challenge to the monoculture of capitalocentric economic theory that has devalued or ignored the contribution of non-capitalist economic activities (see Gibson-Graham 2005). Our interest in building new worlds involves participatory action research that makes credible the diverse practices by which interdependence between people and environments is ethically negotiated within "community economies" that can be recognized now and constructed in the future (Gibson-Graham 2006: Chapter 4).

The technique of reading for difference has a number of effects. It discursively acknowledges the always already diverse economic practices that coexist in every landscape (see for example St. Martin 2005). It clarifies the choices we have in the policy realm to support and proliferate diversity, to destroy or allow it to deteriorate, or indeed to promote uniformity. It also opens up the theorization (and thus performance) of dominance to research and questioning. Diversity exists not only in the domain of non-capitalist economic activity. As much of mainstream economic geography illustrates, capitalist enterprise is itself a site of difference that can be performatively enhanced or suppressed through research. Reading for

difference in the realm of capitalist business can even produce insight into the potential contributions of private corporations to building other possible worlds (Hamilton 2009).

### *Creativity: Generating Possibilities*

The final technique is that of thinking creatively in order to generate actual possibilities where none formerly existed. Creative thinking often involves bringing things together from different domains to spawn something new, a practice called “cross-structuring” (Smith 1973) or “cross-appropriation” (Spinosa, Flores, and Dreyfus 1997), or “extension” (Varela 1992). Such techniques are a powerful means of proliferating possibilities.

The late Jane Jacobs’ extension of complex ecological thinking to the economic domain is an instructive case of creative thinking. Jacobs made path-breaking attempts to “re-naturalize” the economy, helping us to think about economic “development, expansion, sustainability, and correction” in radically different ways (2000: 12). She asks us to abandon the economists’ view of the “supernatural” economy and to recognize economies as just one of nature’s systems that “require diversity to expand, self-refuelling to maintain themselves, and co-developments to develop” (Jacobs 2000: 143–4).

Along with others, she calls for social analysts to take seriously the dynamics of complexity: emergence, self-organization, bifurcation, non-linearity, dissipation, and instability (Escobar 2008; Law and Urry 2004; Capra 1996). Her naturalistic metaphors of complex dynamics offer alternative ways of thinking about economic determination and causality that counter existing understandings influenced by metaphors drawn from mechanics or psychology. One outcome of this cross-pollination of ideas is the notion that even the smallest ethical intervention might have potentially wide-ranging effects.

Jacobs’ work exemplifies one of the creative tools of history making, to bring concepts and practices into “contexts that couldn’t generate them, but in which they are useful” (Spinosa, Flores, and Dreyfus 1997: 4). For Scott Sharpe, this sort of fruitful combining across domains can potentially take place in the context of action research and other geographic field work. Sharpe (2002) understands the field as any site where matter and thought fold together in new ways, producing the “event in thought.” Thus the field is not a site where we recognize or particularize what we already know, but a place where we create the new.

Out of our own participatory action research around local economic development the notion of “ethical dynamics” has emerged as a way of pinpointing the individual and group decisions that influence the unpredictable trajectories of diverse economies (whether, for example, diversity is maintained, enhanced, or destroyed). Through action research in the Philippines, greater community awareness of the implications of such ethical decisions has prompted active interventions not only to maintain valued elements of the local economic habitat, but to expand its diversity through the development of community enterprises that strengthen resilience and generate surplus for reinvestment in the community (Gibson, Cahill, and McKay 2010). Here another “cross-appropriation” is taking place as the majority of world NGOs and municipal governments look to social enterprise development in economically marginalized areas of the minority world for non-mainstream enterprise models that can be adapted to the Philippine context.

When we look back on our previous lives as Marxist geographers, we recognize our role as critical academics in inventing and consolidating a certain sort of capitalism by endowing it with encompassing power, generalizing its dynamics and organizations, and enlarging the spaces of its agency. The three techniques of thinking outlined above are interventions that

unravel and dissolve this structural power, imagine specific and yet context shaping dynamics, and enlarge the space of agency of all sorts of actors – non-capitalist as well as capitalist, disorganized as well as organized, non-human as well as human. A plethora of challenging research agendas emerge from this thinking (see the bibliography in Gibson-Graham 2008). All of them push us to make something new from what is at hand. They are predicated on a reframed ontology of becoming, orienting us to difference and possibility rather than to dominance and predictability. These are the benefits of knowledge as performative.

### **New Academic Practices and Performances**

At the outset of this chapter we hinted that a new academic subject might be on the horizon, one who is differently related to the politics of "other worlds." In this section we come back to this tantalizing claim, making it concrete. We ask how as academic researchers we can perform alternative economies? We already outlined the hopeful, reparative, non-judgmental affective stance that enables us to inhabit a diverse economic landscape of possibility. But is there more to enactment than vague generalities about the performativity of research? We think there is. In this last section of this chapter, we depict the academy as an advantageous place from which to perform other worlds and illustrate how performative social experiments can be enacted by hybrid research collectivities, including but not limited to academics.

We are most interested in the enactment and support of community economies, which we theorize and explore empirically and experientially in *A Postcapitalist Politics* (2006). Community economies are economic spaces or networks in which relations of interdependence are democratically negotiated by participating individuals and organizations. They can be constituted at any scale, as in Healy (2008) who envisions a community health care economy on a national level, or in St. Martin (2005) whose research is building regional networks of fishers.

Our interest in building community economies means that diverse economies are not an end in themselves but a precursor and prerequisite for a collective project of experimental construction. We use the tools and techniques of diverse economies research to make visible the resources available for building community economies (see Gibson-Graham 2005), as well as to lend credibility to the existence and continual emergence of "other economies" worldwide.

To foster the global performance of community economies we have cultivated ourselves as new kinds of academic subjects, open to the techniques of ethical thinking outlined above that elaborate a new economic ontology. But there are other subjective factors required to create the environment where the facts of diverse/community economies can emerge and thrive. The first is an experimental attitude toward the objects of research, and the second is an orientation toward a collective research practice involving non-academic as well as academic subjects.

Most recently our commitments to an experimental attitude and collective research practice have been tested. We find ourselves increasingly unable to think about enacting community economies without addressing ourselves to the interdependence of humans with the more than human world. The climate crisis and arrival of the Anthropocene has deeply (some might consider belatedly) affected our thinking and practice, turning our action research into an exploration of living differently in this world. We are compelled to ask: can our solidarity for fellow humans struggling to live dignified lives be extended to earth others, both animate and inanimate?

To go on in a “different mode of humanity” to quote Plumwood (2007:1) we must deploy our ethics of thinking in new directions. It involves: undertaking an additional ontological reframing that repositions humankind and earthkinds in horizontal relations of interconnection, not binary relations of hierarchy; learning to be affected and moved by the multiverse of differentiations, not just of diverse economies but of diverse ecologies, species, and abiota; and creating opportunities for new worlds to be disclosed by participating in hybrid research collectives that recognize the input of a range of actants both human and more than human (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010). The challenges posed by the Anthropocene are ones that take us, as scholars trained as economic geographers, far out of our comfort zone.

At present we are experimenting with reorienting our participatory action research methods so that community inventories include the gifts of “nature” that form a crucial asset base of any local economy and “nature’s” needs, alongside inventories of the assets, including of diverse economic practices, and needs of human communities who are seeking new pathways for people-centered regional development (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009). No longer can the needs of river systems, ecological communities, and threatened species be ignored in regional development plans. Already, the compromised dignity of species and environments has mobilized actants, human and non, around particular matters of concern. Rather than attempting to bridge an imagined divide between academy and community (by becoming activists in a traditional sense), we can exercise our academic capacities in a performative division of labor that involves many social locations and callings. In Sydney’s west we are learning to be affected in new ways and, using the platform of a regionally based university, are planning to mobilize resources to support the co-creation of knowledges, create the networks necessary to spread these knowledges, work with activists, scientists, other species, artists, and academics of the future, and foster an environment where new facts can survive (Gibson-Graham 2011). These are just a few of the ways that we can use an academic platform to participate in the collective performance of “other economies” for the Anthropocene. And if we treat the academy itself as a vast “uncontrolled experiment” (Berwick 2004: 286), continually producing information about how it could be improved as an agent of change, we may find many ways to perform new worlds from an academic location.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have identified aspects of our existing academic selves that stand in the way of performing new worlds and have discussed three orientations or stances towards thinking, research, and politics that might better equip us for the task:

- a performative epistemology rather than a realist or reflective one;
- an ethical rather than a structural understanding of social determination;
- an experimental rather than critical orientation to research.

Each of these stances reconfigures our role as academics and changes the nature of our relationships to the academy and wider community.

The diverse economies research program takes as its explicit motivation the performance of other economies both within the academy and outside. This chapter is an invitation to others situated in the academy to join this project and its hybrid collectivities. As always, we are happy to “start where we are” in our places of work where practices of collegiality and an understanding of an intellectual commons still prevail, despite the encroaching

commercialization and casualization of university life. Academia remains a setting for what Harvie (2004: 2) calls "commons-based peer production" that values collaborative engagement and respects and requires the sharing and gifting of output. In this research community our knowledge and other products could become part of a new commons that other academics and non-academics could draw upon and enlarge. By constituting an academic community economy based on a knowledge commons, we could contribute to performing community economies worldwide.

## Note

- 1 Our thanks to Sage Publications Ltd for permission to republish a shortened and significantly modified version of our 2008 paper. Heartfelt thanks to Trevor Barnes for his patience and assistance with reshaping this piece for inclusion in the year after the loss of Julie.

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