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Reading Diverse Economies with Desire, Creating Spaces for Communism

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A Starting Idea, Communism

A striking common thread of the recent re-articulations of the "idea of communism" is the claim that communism should not be thought of as an absolute end-point where social antagonism would inevitably be resolved, nor as a blueprint through which the social is organized.[2] Communism is instead proposed as a starting principle, a hypothesis, or an axiom, divorced from teleological visions of socialism where class antagonism is superseded once and for all.[3] As an axiom, or proposition, communism is accessible to all and ready to be set in motion at each and every conjuncture. It is associated with a shift of perspective at the level of subjectivity, demonstrating that one can think and live otherwise. The axiom inaugurates a process of emancipation without any determined end and without any guarantees. The vitality of this process would in each case depend on the institutional experimentations and inventions of new slogans (community economies, solidarity economies, occupy and so on).

With this shift of perspective from blueprint to proposition, it is possible to reconsider Marx's well-known adage "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" as *one* version of the communist axiom. At first sight, this return to an old maxim might seem odd. It is true that Marx's communist maxim precipitated from a particular conjuncture. Nonetheless, we argue it carries a momentum that exceeds the historicity of its emergence and allows it to be re-activated as an axiom. This is because an axiom is not a fully-fledged thought simply to be

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[2] Recent references are the special issue of *Rethinking Marxism* on "The Common and the Forms of the Commune" (Curcio and Özselçuk 2010) and the two edited book volumes on *The Idea of Communism* (Douzinas and Zizek 2010; Zizek 2013).
[3] See especially the essay by Alain Badiou (2010).

dictated into existing practices—that would make the axiom into another ideal—but rather a "half-said" which "requires an actual act" for its completion in different contexts (Copjec 2002, 171). Instead of assuming this maxim as a description of the end of history, of a utopian plenitude-to-come, where each of us realizes our abilities and satisfies our needs, what if we take it as an hypothesis that aims to destabilize the sedimented social relations of "ability" and "need" in order to activate their contextual re-signification? This way it becomes possible to assert and mobilize Marx's communist axiom in any social site against the various forms of economic idealizations, such as Keynesian Fordist developmentalism, neoliberal market fundamentalism, normative communalism, and so on.

In this chapter, we propose to read the contemporary proliferation of post-capitalist experimentations (Gibson-Graham 2006; Mance 2007) from the perspective of Marx's axiom, as so many different ways in which communities put the communist hypothesis to the test again and again, negotiate antagonisms both from within and without, and complete the "half-said" with "actual acts" that create new worlds where desires are rekindled and abilities are redistributed.[4] For this, however, as Étienne Balibar has eloquently put it, it may first be necessary to shift our central research question from "what is communism?" (a question that insinuates a ground for a template of action) to a rather more modest and curious, "who are the communists?" (Balibar and Negri 2010, 325-26). Indeed, in order to learn from the institutional innovations and day-to-day practices with which communities around the world denaturalize needs and abilities and turn them into issues of political, cultural and economic negotiation, it is necessary to begin with asking questions like, among others, who are the communists, where are they, and what are they doing?

The possibility of exploring the answers to such questions regarding actually-existing communisms lies in cultivating a conceptual disposition (entailing both an ability and a desire) for envisioning a porous social field and a subjectivity with no "fixed values, interests, and battles to fight" (Copjec 1990, 52) and in intentionally relinquishing the notion of a social which is tightly secured and consistently determined by logics of economic necessity, be it the humanist interest of choice or the structuralist interest of accumulation. The *diverse economies* research program, pioneered by J. K. Gibson-Graham, involves such an ontological break. It

[4] We do not want to suggest this is the only version of the axiom enacted in post-capitalist experimentations, nor do we wish to enforce Marx's axiom onto the particular discourses of communities in those exact terms. As Álvaro Reyes alerts us there is a diversity of practices through which movements "might express the truth of that axiom in another mode" (2010, 501).

offers a new ethico-political framework that renders a different thought of economy as an interdependent, heterogeneous, and porous field populated by a diversity of institutional forms and devices (ranging from capitalist firms to alternative currencies, from feudal households to child-care cooperatives) connected to each other via a variety of integrative forms and contingent logics, as a socially constituted field sutured with knots of ethical decisions and in perpetual need of reproduction.

Such an ontological reorientation carries within itself a subjective positioning which can be intimidating as it entails the destabilization of the obviousness and certainty of the ground on which one stands. This is the ambivalent experience of the movement of desire. In this paper, we will trace the movement of desire on two levels, in the production of knowledge of diverse economies (which we discuss in the last section) and in the enactment of the communist axiom in community economies. In both instances, we do not understand desire as an identification with a complete and finished project or an idealized object. As a research project, diverse economies is not about providing a more complete picture of the economy but rather about constituting a field of economic difference with a curiosity and readiness to be surprised. Similarly, in the performances of the axiom, desire emerges not as an orientation towards an economic model or a blueprint with their attendant promises for guaranteed satisfaction, but rather as a surplus, as the excess of demand which cannot be addressed by the mere satisfaction of needs (as if needs could be known with certainty), that opens towards another way of organizing our relation to the provisioning for our livelihoods—with all the affective and pecuniary risks involved in such experimentations.

In this regard, we mobilize a Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective on desire as it is distinguished both from theoretical humanist approaches that psychologize desire and make it an intentional human striving for a positive good, and from structuralist accounts that make it an effect of culture and history (e.g., Copjec 1994; Kingsbury 2007). For Lacan, desire is neither reducible to biology nor to culture; rather, it emerges in the intersection of the two spheres and bears effects on them in a way that disallows the treatment of these spheres as externally related and self-contained. Emphasizing this constitutive role of desire, Lacan adds the significant thesis that there is a certain impossibility internal to the structure of desire, i.e., that desire does not have a fitting object, that it is caused by a constitutive failure. As we will discuss in further detail throughout the chapter, this thesis has far reaching consequences for our understanding of the communist axiom. The impossibility that structures desire implies that there is no social arrangement that will establish a coherent and conclusive balance

between need and ability, or with regards to any economic distribution for that matter. This insight renders the ethical inseparable from the question of how we relate to this "impossible good" of desire and how we enjoy, or, better yet, suffer from this impossibility.

In what follows, we offer a psychoanalytically-inflected reading of two alternative economic initiatives previously investigated by Gibson-Graham and members of the Community Economies Collective as two instances of post-capitalist experiments where the communist hypothesis is put to work. These initiatives are the *Asian Migrant Center* in Hong Kong and *Nuestras Raíces* in Holyoke, Massachusetts, USA (see Gibson et al 2001; Gibson-Graham 2006; Healy and Graham 2008). We trace how these initiatives create new ways of organizing their relation to need and ability and how this is intimately connected with a change in the subjective relation to enjoyment. In our first example, indentured migrant workers in Hong Kong begin to break from idealized conceptions of need and, in establishing business enterprises (for which pooling their savings serves as a condition of existence), begin to desire a new subjectivity. Here, we argue that desire, rather than aiming at achieving a "full" (and ultimately impossible) enjoyment through consumption (of commodities *qua* idealized objects), aims at a new way of being, finding support in a practical (and non-idealized form of) "partial" enjoyment, experienced through the *ethical space* of a savings union. We read our second example, that of an urban-agriculture collective in Holyoke, Massachusetts, as creating a *public platform* both for everyone wishing to join in to do so according to their available capabilities and for mobilizing desire to explore new abilities and cultivate new needs. The collective enables a partial enjoyment of abilities that neither naturalizes them as given and unchangeable, nor ranks them according to an ideal, such as the economic efficiency criterion. The recent collaboration of the collective with *Moveable Feast*, a public art project on food, makes visible a new space of community by intersecting social positions, practices and places where such encounters were not conceivable within the existing racialized and classed division of labor and patterns of consumption and living at the regional scale.

These two post-capitalist experiments create new institutional forms that allow for reflection upon need and ability at the level of a subject's desire and its relation to enjoyment. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, sublimation, through the creation and maintenance of new spaces that give visibility to relations that are previously deemed impossible, enables the movement of desire. These new relations, rendered visible through sublimation, now become "objects that are socially valorized, objects of which the group approves, insofar as they are objects of public

utility" (Lacan 1992, 94). In these post-capitalist experiments, the communist axiom is enacted in and through sublimated spaces where novel relations to needs and abilities are cultivated.

AGAINST ECONOMIC MORALITIES

From the perspective of the diverse economies project, economic development agendas perform particular moralities through ordering the economy and the social in idealized ways. In the post-war era, for example, a Keynesian-Fordist developmentalism (with certain institutional variations across the "three worlds" of the Cold War) imposed a particular economic morality for the (post-colonial) order of nation-states with attendant injunctions for economic growth, full employment, mass consumption, and modernization through technology and industrialization. The contingencies of place were obliterated by recipes for normalization through capital accumulation and economic convergence. In the socialist world a different developmentalist morality imposed a distinctive productivism with its socializing mandate on individual labors that was supposed to deliver a reconciled society. Today, we read neoliberalism as a new morality that promises to deliver social harmony through the institution of incentives that are supposed to elicit the "right" economic behavior and lead to an efficient distribution of economic values to individual choices and productivities (Madra and Adaman 2014). Through positing this fantasmatic notion of economic efficiency as the untouchable goal of economic activities, neoliberalism aims to govern the distribution and assessment of abilities (i.e., according to what market value human capital deserves) and wants.[5]

The diverse economies project reads the economy against the narratives of economic moralities. It situates the economy as a de-structured field of different economic relations, composed of different forms of enterprises (capitalist, alternative capitalist, communal, independent, feudal, and slave), transactions (nonmarket, market, alternative market), and laboring (unpaid, wage labor, alternative paid, formal, informal) (CEC 2001; Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003; Gibson-Graham 2008). It makes visible previously hidden and marginalized economic relations (e.g., alternative credit transactions) as well as bringing into existence new objects (e.g., global households) and new agents (e.g., transnational migrant

[5] Economic efficiency is a fantasmatic notion insofar as it attempts to structure our relationship to the real through the promise of a transparent and unified social order which is supposed to work smoothly only if some "external obstacle" (e.g., missing markets, government intervention) were not there to frustrate it. Such frustration, moreover, rather than prompting the dissolution of the fantasy, forms a constitutive dimension of it: one can always come up with new and inconsistent rationalizations to keep fantasy rolling.

networks), thus, expanding the field of intervention of economic policy and politics (see, for instance, Safri and Graham in this volume). This reading sees any place as "not fully yoked into a system of meaning," as both full of potential and empty of determinism (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxxiii). Place is where the contingencies of ethics and politics are to be played out on an uncolonized terrain. Developmental agendas with their prescriptive moralities attempt to fill, contain and cover over the inherent contingency, or "negativity of place" (xxxiii, 222).

We should note that this exercise of bringing into view new and formerly invisible economic relations does something quite different than replacing the negativity of place with a positivity. While it is true that the diverse economies project intends to represent unvalued or undervalued economic sources and capacities, we think its landmark contribution goes beyond a politics of representation.[6] What the diverse economies project does is to open a new space from the contingency/negativity of place, a different topography of economy in which the relationship between the visible (e.g., market, capitalist, paid) and the invisible (e.g., non-market, non-capitalist, unpaid) is transformed. *Both* the previously "valued" *and* the newly recognized economic relations gain a new mode of *visibility* and *valuation*. They are severed from the pre-established values that embed them and they are rendered capable of being rearticulated such that "*all* sectors of goods and service provision" can be a part of collective economic initiatives (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003, 153). Simultaneously, the orientation of economic politics shifts from the question of how to *construct a more complete economic representation* to one of how to *conduct oneself in an inconsistent economic space*. Within this new sense of economic space, notions of *marginalization*, *expansion* and *alternative* also take on other meanings.

To begin with, *marginalization* concerns "everyone" who is "marginalized by the dominant conception of Economy that is assumed to govern itself and to disproportionately affect the surrounding social space" (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2009, 17). Certainly, the point is not to ignore particular social groups whose production of economic relations remain uncounted in dominant economic discourses; rather, it is to shift the perspective to a new question which concerns the extent to which such evident marginalizations are conditioned through attributing a fullness of identity, a single organizing principle, or a particular economic morality to

[6] Our argument finds resonance in an insightful essay by Scott Sharpe (2011). Following a different conceptual path on desire, Sharpe mobilizes Deleuzian concepts of *disjunctive synthesis* and *virtuality* in order to argue for why the work of Gibson-Graham goes beyond a project of representation and recognition.

economy. For instance, to what extent is the marginalization of household laborers conditioned by the normative association of human freedom and agency with a system of monetized commodity exchange? Or, to what extent is the marginalization of non-human populations a consequence of the normative anthropocentric association of the health of an economy with its rate of growth? Needless to say these economic moralities are not the sole causes of these marginalizations, but they are *performative* of them and provide a condition of existence for their reproduction (Healy 2009, 339).

In a similar vein, *expansion* is not a matter of "adding on" and "counting in" those "marginalized" or "alternative" sectors of the economy, for instance, gift transactions or household labor, in order to arrive at a more complete economy (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003). Such strategies of completion, either by ascribing a homogenous logic to the previously missing part(s) (e.g., altruism in gift relations), or by bringing the once excluded part(s) under a unified and essential logic of economy (e.g., revaluing uncounted transactions in terms of price indexes) reconfirm the conception of economy as a totality. These strategies eventually settle on the question of how to increase "social well-being," as if well-being were a well-defined or an eventually definable whole. Instead, the diverse economies approach, in breaking with both the essentialism of *the part* and that of *the whole*, provides a context to rethink and redefine social well-being, and asks a markedly different question: how to conduct economic politics in a field of diverse and partially fixed identities?

In fact, it is the partial fixity of identity that allows for a reformulation of the meaning of *alternative*, one which differs from its commonly held designation as the quality of a restricted and relatively powerless place within the given social configuration.[7] In the diverse economies framing, alternative stands for the possibility of producing a new relation to economy and practicing interdependency by struggling over, negotiating and building a space from the differences internal to existing economic configurations or entities. When alternative qualifies markets, capitalist enterprises, and wage labor, for instance, it signifies the difficulty of establishing a definite identity, say, of a capitalist firm or a production cooperative (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003; Healy and Graham 2008). As Gibson-Graham states, our interest is not "in performing difference *per se*," nor is it "the growth of 'alternative' economic activities"

[7] Stephen Healy explains the marginal and weak position often ascribed to the alternative as a consequence of understanding dominance "from a realist epistemological perspective" that believes "it is possible to gauge relative degrees of power and the extent of vulnerability and powerlessness" (2009, 338).

(2008, 630). Rather, in presenting "[t]he alternative economy as economic difference" (Healy 2009, 339), the diverse economies framing provides an ontological horizon for the materialization of economies as an open-ended set that can accommodate new entities, as well as new significations of those that already exists.[8]

Within this horizon, Gibson-Graham proposes *community economy* as her version of the communist hypothesis. She sees communism as "a task of thought still and increasingly open" (2006, 97) and mobilizes the community economy as "an empty signifier whose ability to unify a heterogeneous discursive field [consisting of diverse, internally dislocated, partially fixed, and potentially unstable identities] rests on its never achieving a complete or fully specified meaning" (222). Again, she considers "the practice of building a community economy as a process of continual resignification, of repeated traversals of any fantasy that there is a perfect community economy that lies outside of negotiation, struggle, uncertainty, ambivalence, disappointment, one that tells us what to do and how to be 'communal'" (98-9). In other words, she places the community economy on the side of the ethical and the political, and against different forms of economic moralisms. As the ethical coordinates of the practice of community economy, Gibson-Graham delineates four areas, each with "a lengthy lineage in economic thought" (88, 101): *necessity* (*needs*), *surplus*, *consumption* and *commons*. More recently, Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) have extended the list to include *encounter* and *investment*. These six ethical coordinates harbor a series of questions that need to be negotiated, deliberated and agonized over if the ethical dimension of decisions is to be foregrounded: What is necessary, what are our needs, what is more than necessary, how long should we work, how much longer should we work beyond what is socially deemed necessary, what is social surplus, how should it be distributed, what should be its form, how should we organize our encounters with other humans as well as non-humans, how much should we consume, what is sufficient, what should be the magnitude, the rate of growth and the privileged areas of investment, how should we organize the regimes in which we produce and sustain both social and natural commons, and so on. By cultivating an awareness of these and other related questions pertaining to economic politics, practices of community economy aim to resignify "economy as a site of decision, of ethical praxis, instead of as the ultimate reality/container/constraint" and "all economic practices as inherently social and always connected in their concrete

[8] For an account of the history in which the diverse economies framework has expanded over time through such new additions and significations, see Gibson-Graham (2006) and the Introduction to this volume.

particularities to the 'commerce of being-together'" (Gibson-Graham 2006, 87-8; inner quote from Nancy 2000, 74).

INTERDEPENDENCY WITH ANTAGONISM

In the writings of the diverse economies research project, the idea of *interdependency* occupies a privileged position and operates first and foremost as a description of the ontological condition of all identities, whether it be that of an economy, a place, an enterprise, a transaction, a group or an individual. All identities are constituted by and are dependent upon their constitutive outside. Within the framework of community economies however, the idea of interdependency gains an additional purpose beyond this descriptive function as the source for resocializing and repoliticizing the economy. As such, Gibson-Graham deploys interdependency as an empty signifier that calls for the production of its meaning through the concrete practices of community economy. For her, the practice of community economy "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" (Gibson-Graham 2006, 88; emphasis added). The idea of interdependency functions both as an ontological concept that describes the being (-in-common)[9] of diverse economy and an ethical proposition that needs to be reflected upon, discussed, negotiated, and foregrounded within the ethical conduct of the community economy. Precisely because it resists anchoring itself in the security of a positive ontology (e.g., the innate human propensity to pursue self-interest, or the inexorable march of history) and serves the purpose of keeping the space of ethical decision open, the foregrounding of interdependency as an empty signifier offers a valuable platform against moralism.

Like the idea of community economy, Marx's communist axiom also foregrounds interdependency. Those who need (all of us) are dependent upon those who are able (all of us). Yet, the axiom cannot be read as a statement of equivalence, as a blueprint for a regime of adequation between abilities and needs. That would be a new form of economic moralism. Rather, it should be regarded as a restatement of *productive, appropriative* and *distributive justice* as open-ended ethico-political questions, as problems to be addressed collectively, through a

[9] Jean-Luc Nancy distinguishes "being-in-common" from "common being" (1991). If "common-being" describes community as a unified and a unifiable property—that finds one of its dominant expressions in the homogenizing and "unidimensional social space" of socialism, grounded in the conception of "human beings as producers and laboring multitudes"—"being-in-common" envisions community as "an open social space," "negotiated and constructed in and through diverse subjectivities" (Callari and Ruccio 2010, 413-4).

negotiation of their interdependent nature (see also, DeMartino 2003). From a psychoanalytical perspective the axiom maintains a *non-relation* (or better yet, a disjunctive relation) between abilities and needs, not because abilities cannot be matched to needs—we do this every day through different forms of integration—but because neither abilities nor needs can be unambiguously pinned down. Contrary to expectations of a harmonious resolution harbored, for example, by Habermasian theories of communicative rationality, psychoanalytical theory insists that this negotiation is always conducted in a terrain in which the coincidence of abilities and needs is perpetually thwarted, not by some external obstacle but by a certain internal instability, an irreconcilable antagonism that divides both needs as well as abilities from within.

In contrast to social constructivist accounts, where antagonism is located between various subject positions (issued from structural locations), in psychoanalysis, antagonism refers to "the traumatic kernel the symbolization of which always fails" (Zizek 1990, 251). The cut that the signification marks on the body produces a surplus as a by-product, a remainder that the signification can neither fully account for, nor domesticate and contain. This remainder, surplus, in turn, acts as the anchorage point of enjoyment (*jouissance*), permanently disrupting from within the operation of imaginary and symbolic identifications. Antagonism is the very impossibility of the subject to internalize this remainder and fully constitute herself, to be self-transparent about questions pertaining to her being and her wants, her needs and abilities. The subject's enjoyment encircles around this inassimilable remainder and her singular fantasies organize and sustain this enjoyment in an attempt to make up for her constitutive opaqueness. Social fantasies are successful to the extent that they are flexible enough to provide answers to the subjects' questions regarding not only what kinds of needs are acceptable and what the proper distribution of abilities are (between mental and manual labor, between genders and races, etc.), but also what thwarts the satisfaction of their needs and the proper organization of the division of labor. Nonetheless, no social fantasy can reconcile the subject with her enjoyment; since the subject's enjoyment is always in excess of the subject, the social fantasies that the subject resorts to can never fully domesticate the inexorable loop of enjoyment (also known as drive). Unstable and ambiguous, enjoyment is never simply pleasure; it is simultaneously pain in pleasure and pleasure in pain. In short, enjoyment is what is more-than-human in psychoanalysis.

A post-capitalist politics of interdependency moves beyond the project of recognition and social reconciliation when it foregrounds the constitutive instability of enjoyment in the formation of every interdependency. The unstable and ambiguous nature of enjoyment operates as a

disruptive force for all models, collective projects, evaluation criteria, and goal-oriented designs that attempt to designate, classify and value need and ability. We think that an economic politics which calls attention to the ambivalence in need and ability will necessarily be different from one which treats need and ability as if each has a meaning transparent to us. Such a politics neither approaches the servicing of needs as a natural issue, nor tackles the distribution of abilities as a simple technical matter. More importantly, it begins by acknowledging that enacting the communist axiom would rely not only on an insistence of equality (from each…to each), but also on an undoing and reconfiguring of the affective and sensual orders that hold inequalities in place. We think that communisms realize themselves through the path of sublimation—the "creation and maintenance of a certain space for objects that have no place in the given, extant reality, objects that are considered 'impossible'" (Zupancic 2003, 77-8). In the next two sections, we trace how communities travel the path of sublimation, first, in terms of *need* and then, in terms of *ability*.

DESIRING NEEDS, CREATING SPACES

The second part of the communist axiom "according to needs" offers a profound jolt that interrupts the neoliberal demand for more and more individuating consumption and the concomitant expansion of productive consumption of surplus that supports it. The phrase "according to needs" valorizes sufficiency. But needs are never that self-evident to be defined and satisfied (Nancy 2010). In so far as they are constituted in the socio-symbolic order, needs are irreducible to biological requirements or the functional necessities of life (Lacan 2006, 680). This is not so much to emphasize the historical and social specificity and multiplicity of needs as to bring into view the fundamental instability that characterizes them. The articulation of need does not only aim at a specified object of fulfillment, but also involves a *demand* for a place in the socio-symbolic order. However, according to psychoanalysis such a place will never be secured, because the socio-symbolic order can deliver to us no transparent position, no firm role. This is because the socio-symbolic order itself is divided and destabilized by uncanny and more-than-human enjoyment. Lacan's statement "there is no Other of the Other" (that gives consistency to the symbolic order) precisely speaks of this truth. Consequently, a constitutive impossibility of fulfillment is inscribed in every demand. In fact, one of the ways desire is conceived is in the figure of what comes into being in that very gap in each demand for "need

satisfaction."[10] For this reason, desire detaches the discussion of needs from a stable ground of human requirements.

From this perspective, social designs for allocating needs through equal distribution, such as the traditional models of socialist planning, can be seen as one modality to manage the problem of the (non)satisfaction of needs, one that delimits the public space in which to articulate desire. If for state socialism, satisfying needs through a centralized organization of the division of labor is what should guide human desire, for neoliberalism it is the rational preferences of *homo oeconomicus* (more consumption, improvement of life standards, optimization of human capital, and so on) which is to be put into operation through incentive mechanisms. Proceeding from the assumption of a subject with essential and transparent needs and faculties, the two imaginaries share an alliance in the different ways they deny the singularity and negativity of desire by imposing and administering specified objectives of satisfaction.

In particular, the neoliberal administration of desire, which provides the broader context of our first example, through enforcing the same principle for satisfaction in every social sphere (from labor and credit allocation to skill training, from crime prevention to poverty alleviation, and so on), clogs up desire in a closed circuit. While murdering desire, this closed circuit ends up providing an assemblage, a libidinal dispositif for the enjoyment to endlessly loop around and the subject begins to derive enjoyment as a "by-product, so to speak, of the dissatisfaction of desire" (Dolar 2001, 132). However, enjoyment is not to be regarded in the figure of a build-up of some stable stock. Rather, as a surplus that is increasingly burdensome, enjoyment instigates an unstable and crisis-ridden subjectivity operating under the oppression of superegoic injunctions (e.g., *Enjoy!*, *Invest in your human capital!*, *Be an entrepreneur!*, and so on). Such superegoic injunctions can never be satisfied since they operate on the paradoxical logic of guilt that demands more even as one tries harder. This is why the disruption of this economy will not come from supplying and adding into the circuit newly designated objects to choose from,[11] but rather, from ensuring that one "wants it in the first place" (Copjec 2002, 173), that

[10] Lacan says "Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need, this margin being the one that demand—whose appeal can be unconditional only with respect to the Other—opens up in the guise of the possible gap need may give rise to here, because it has no universal satisfaction (this is called "anxiety")" (2006, 680).
[11] Salecl (2003), Binkley (2009) and Özselçuk and Madra (2010) explore the psychic predicaments of too-much choice.

is, from providing some relief to desire from the heavy burden of enjoyment so that it is set off to producing new spaces, new relations and new subjects.

The diverse economies and community economies projects precisely serve as contexts to facilitate such an articulation of desire, as a key step, through dissociating the conduct of economic practices and relations from its subjugation to moralizing ideals. When these projects adopt the principle of "start here and now" in order to map from available experiences a diversity of economic transactions, forms of laboring and enterprises, this has the effect of detaching each economic practice from the determination of an a priori judgment or a law. It also simultaneously brings about a resubjectivation effect, for it enables an encounter with the non-existence of the Economy qua the ultimate guarantor of the symbolic order, Big Other. Questions such as what is necessary? how should surplus be distributed? what and how to consume? or how do we sustain a commons? truly become questions once there is no longer an Other (e.g., an economic ideal) that is supposed to answer and resolve these issues for us.

A community economy is a sublimated space where we can not only encounter and accept the non-existence of the Economy but also find in this constitutive non-existence the support for desire to construct new objects (McNulty 2009, 25). That is, community economies can act both as sites of disidentification from the ways desire is encumbered by regimentations of needs and consumption, and sites for the creation of new values and new collective modes of being. Community economies propose a new name—a "new nodal point" (Gibson-Graham 2006, 78)—a not-yet-so-positive project around which desire can circulate, materializing new practices, establishing new interdependencies and reconfiguring perceptions, including those that pertain to needs and consumption. This is the way we read, for instance, the institutionalization of a community economy through the reintegration program organized by The *Asian Migrant Center* (AMC).[12]

The Migrant Savings for Alternative Investment (MSAI) program encourages Filipina overseas contract migrants (working for the most part in the form of indentured laborers in Hong Kong and other global locations) to pool their savings and invest in business enterprises at home. This program has become a site for some migrants to dis-invest themselves from what the

[12] The Asian Migrant Centre (AMC) was formed in 1989 to address the collective problems of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, many of whom work on limited term contracts and live in employers' homes. The AMC has supported the growth of domestic worker unions and has pioneered the 'Reintegration Programme' (Gibson, Law and McKay, 2001: 378).

psychoanalytical approach calls “interpassive” enjoyment (Dolar 2001; Healy 2010, 501-2; Zizek 1997, 44-7), a modality of enjoyment where certain others enjoy on our behalf. These others qua subjects-supposed-to enjoy can be embodied in a wide range of figures including the crying ladies in European funerals, movie or reality-TV stars in contemporary media culture, “exceptional” entrepreneurs such as Steve Jobs, or even the very mechanical canned laughter in sit-coms. Interpassive enjoyment operates through the substitution of other’s enjoyment for that of the subject, a form of holding enjoyment in abeyance that saves the subject from the guilt of superegoic demands.

In our case, interpassivity describes the pacific relation of the migrants to the exotic world of commodities that arranges their individual consumption, rendering it, its enjoyment, almost as a mechanical procedure. One member describes:

> The objective of this Reintegration [Programme] is that it will help us to do something while we are here in Hong Kong to save … it is very easy saying that we can save while we are working here but the fact that there are so many temptations. Like we are here in Hong Kong – there are so many stars in your eyes… Hong Kong is the place you can see everything, you can buy anything because you have your money with you … even the canned goods which is not very original, but come from US or UK, [or] just Chinese or Malaysian, [you] can put them all in a box and send to the Philippines. (Gibson, Law and McKay 2001, 379; insertions original)

In this passage the Reintegration Programme is presented as something that helps a member to traverse her interpassive relation to enjoyment (consumption of “canned goods”) and instead “do something” to save. Already in the way this member narrates her routine experience of Hong Kong, we detect a distancing, the beginnings of a disinvestment from the demands of the consumerist superego who tells her that she can “see everything” and “buy anything.” As a result of this distancing the subject can now give up her interpassive enjoyment that she derives from the “canned goods” of the glistening big Other *qua* International Capital that pile up in the shopping malls of Hong Kong as well as other metropolises. In a way, she does not need a defense formation to protect her from the cruel consumerist superego anymore.

An interview with another member reveals that the attachment of migrants to this interpellation of consumption also carries the weight of family demands back home for procuring the “necessities” through remittances. The prospects of a business enterprise enable participants in the MSAI program to gain a measure of affective distance not only from the

interpassive structure of consumption, but also, at least for some, from the familial administration of "needs":

> I told them … I said I just send a certain amount to you to pay the bill, the electric bill, to be able to buy the necessary things. About the rice they don't need to buy because they cultivate the land … (Gibson, Law and McKay 2001,379).

It would be simplistic to read in this statement a disregard for "family needs" or the end of familial antagonism. Instead, we would like to read it as the construction of a new relation to antagonism, one that takes (family) demands not as unchanging rules, as an expression of "objective needs," and actually begins to encounter the investments that suffuse needs with the lien of enjoyment.

Some would say that this transformation of the migrants' revenues from a "consumption fund" to an "investment fund," and the way this transformation has led to the resubjectivation of the migrants to become the first distributors of their surplus only gets to show how desire can easily be coopted back into the global capitalist machine through micro-enterprise projects. Indeed, Gibson, Law and McKay take up precisely this kind of criticism which sees the Reintegration Programme as "endeavoring to turn returning migrants into capitalists" (379).

In our view, what these criticisms miss is the dimension of subjective change. The inability of the critics to decipher the distinctions among different micro-enterprise projects and lump them all under the law of capitalism demonstrates a lack of the curiosity (and do we need to add, desire) that is required when we ask "who are the communists?" We don't deny that many contemporary micro-credit programs afix economic ideals through which desire is harnessed to, for example, a better human capital that produces greater exchange-values. While such micro-credit models anchor desire to the exceptional entrepreneurial injunction (empowerment through market-value maximization), this particular Reintegration Program generates a space where desire is activated for new ways of economic being and where the superegoic demand to enjoy ("you can see everything, you can buy anything") appears no longer to hold sway over the subjects.

A pivotal and somewhat provocative implication of our discussion brings into a sharper focus the unique ethical stance of community economies project. There is no a priori reason why participants involved in community economies research projects have to have matching or uniform identifications with a certain ideal of community economy. While the project of community economies "entails an ongoing process of cultivating subjects who can open up to

new forms of economic being," (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2009, 15) there is really no given or settled object where that desire should aim. Thus, in our example, the *Asian Migrant Center* becomes the channel through which desire is unleashed towards a new mode of being irrespective of what that "being" is. Initially, the desire did not aim towards the positive ideal of forming collective business enterprises, but rather minimally at "doing something" to save. Similarly, in a different context, based on the experiences of action research in the Latrobe Valley of southeastern Australia and the Pioneer Valley of western Massachusetts in the US, Gibson-Graham and Roelvink indicate how, among those who were involved, "some were motivated to take up new activities; others were able to revalue old ones, not formerly seen as economic; and still others became involved in community enterprises, showing their willingness to relate to people in unfamiliar ways" (15). In fact, a very minimum (necessary but not sufficient) condition for the project of community economy to be an open and ongoing process of experimentation is a dis-identification from the tyranny of economic ideals.

One should add that this process of dis-identification is with respect not only to the mainstream ideals of growth, efficiency, and so on, but also to those progressive ideals that imagine the community economy as the uncontaminated and unmixed space of co-ops or non-market exchanges.[13] Healy and Graham argue that the difference between endowing a capitalist firm with a necessary economic logic of interaction with its capitalist as well as non-capitalist others and leaving open the possibility of a variety of interactions between capitalist institutions and non-capitalist ones is a "*matter of perception*" (2008, 30). We should add that this shift of perception is not merely a matter of individual insight, or capacity but rather a consequence of the distribution of what is visible and what is invisible. Though subjective transformations can take their course in singular and multiple ways, redistributions in the institutional framing of visibility provide social conditions for such traversal of fantasy. A once imperceptible relation or an unpersuasive idea (for example, the idea that a non-capitalist enterprise can interact with a capitalist enterprise without becoming co-opted, or becoming capitalist-like) can suddenly become perceptible and persuasive once a certain threshold of organizational density is reached. The community economies project, as it builds an organizational substance and a network of interdependencies, shifts perception that in turn allows a variety of relations to find a place and support in the space that community economy opens (Healy and Graham 2008, 17, 30). It is in

[13] Ken Byrne and Stephen Healy note that those who get involved in co-ops with "too much idealism" generally have a tendency to drop out (2006, 248).

this sense that we regard community economies project as a *site of sublimation*, as the "creation and maintenance of a certain space for objects that have no place in the given, extant reality, objects that are considered 'impossible'" (Zupancic 2003, 77-8).

REDISTRIBUTION OF ABILITIES, RECONFIGURING THE SENSIBLE

We now turn to the first part of the communist axiom "from each according to her ability" which announces a statement of equality in the way communism counts, valorizes, and renders visible each and every ability. We interpret this statement as a refusal to impose a particular regime of the social division of labor, leaving this up to the community's self-organization through its enactment. A similar egalitarian gesture is contained in the commitment of diverse economies and community economies projects "to start where we are" (Gibson-Graham 2006, 98) and document, make visible and "build on what people already know" (Healy and Graham 2008, 19). Just like need, however, ability is not a self-evident and settled human property (Balibar 1994, 2007). Representations of distribution of abilities as spontaneously given and harmoniously reconciled are always mediated and experienced through historically specific forms of sexualized and racialized fantasies which, in assigning "superior/inferior," "excessive/deficient" properties to laboring activities, institute hierarchical divisions and organize a subject's relation to her as well as others' enjoyment. Libidinally charged representations of women as inherently belonging to the "private" and naturalized realm of reproduction, of workers as infantilized, being unable to govern themselves and needing instruction at work, and of immigrants as too unskilled and culturally deficient to participate in the modern urban economy are examples of such sexualized and racialized fantasies. This is why "from each according to her ability" needs to be prefaced with the broader analytical project of questioning and interrupting the fantasmatic attempts to arrange and order the distribution of abilities, that is, "who can do what, and be where" at the level of the social.

In this precise sense, the ethico-political conduct of the urban agriculture and food justice collective *Nuestras Raíces* from western Massachusetts,[14] specifically its practice of community economy in relation to the existing hierarchized and fantasmatic regime of abilities of the

[14] *Nuestras Raíces* is a grass-roots non-profit organization that promotes sustainable development in Holyoke, Massachusetts through projects relating to food, urban agriculture, and the environment. See http://www.nuestras-raices.org/en/support. See also Healy and Graham (2008) and Graham and Cornwell (2009) for two extensive discussions of *Nuestras Raíces* and the ethical dynamics of a community economy that it fosters.

broader geographical region within which the collective is located, enables such a traversal of fantasy. *Nuestras Raíces* approaches each possible community contribution to its project "one by one," not in the idealized sense of including all the abilities, but rather, in the ethico-political sense of being partial to each ability. There is an attempt to include and match up the skills, talents, experiences, and goals of participants "with a project that needs doing" (e.g., conducting research, organizing workshops, helping with business ventures and planning, photo/video documentation of events, and so on). This is to say, *Nuestras Raíces* practices "from each according to her ability" in a way that refuses to posit an a priori principle that excludes or rank-orders abilities.

This position also finds echo in *Nuestras Raíces*' approach to economic development, not as "a narrow project of capitalist growth" which aims to harvest abilities as efficiently as possible, but rather as "a broad endeavor addressing every dimension of social well-being—health and fitness, food and nutrition, environment, education, arts and culture, useful work, personal growth, community" (Graham and Cornwell 2009, 47). In fact, the broadening of the definition and dimensions of "development" and "social well-being" both conditions and is conditioned by the cultivation of existing abilities as well as the making visible of new ones, a dialectical process that the commons of *Nuestras Raíces* has made possible. A consequence is that when *Nuestras Raíces* accepts "each ability as it comes," it does not carry this out according to a fixed criterion of "needs." While *Nuestras Raíces* provides an organizational structure for a population distribution of productive abilities to be matched up "with a project that needs doing," in fact, it does more than that. Through providing a space (a commons) that expands the visible field of "ways of being, doing and making" *Nuestras Raíces* generates desire for the creation of "new needs" (60-2),

To flesh out an idea which is implicit in our discussion: when we refer to the "interruption of the given distribution of abilities," we do not merely suggest that people acquire new abilities, or that their abilities are reshuffled and diversified, which, indeed, can be a crucial aspect of this process (as operationalized in schemes of "job rotation"). Rather what we have in mind is the way the subject attains a critical affective distance from the fantasies of order, hierarchy, and unity that are supposed to domesticate the constitutive impossibility of fixing the question of distribution of abilities. Such a traversal of fantasy entails a new relation to the visibility and valuation of abilities such that their enjoyment is partial (and not subject to the superegoic demands of an idealized distribution and full enjoyment). This means a break not merely with

the "normal" distribution of abilities that redefines who does what, but a break with the fantasmatic idea that "there exists dispositions 'specific' to these positions" (Rancière 2010, 10).

This brings us to a strong analogy between the practice of community economy as the redistribution of abilities and what Jacques Rancière calls the "redistribution of the sensible" (2004, 43). In the context of a discussion of the relation between politics and aesthetics, Rancière views artistic practices as "'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (13). Similarly, for Rancière, politics is a specific "intervention in the visible and the sayable" such that it demonstrates and practices "a dispute over the distribution of what is visible and what not, of what can be heard and what cannot" and "invents new trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said, and what can be done" (2010, 36-7, 149). It follows that artistic and political practices neither belong to a separate realm of the social, nor conform to some standards of a profession; rather they are forms of action which reconfigure the regime of the sensible through the demonstration of a dissent, a discord that is suppressed and banished from the existing spatial and temporal ordering of being. This is the reason why Rancière defines artistic practice as "not the outside of work but its displaced form of visibility" (2004, 43). We think that the community economy practice of *Nuestras Raíces* is in this sense a form of artistic practice which enacts a constant disruption of the distribution of the sensible and enables new ways of relating to work, to abilities, and to "ways of doing and making."

Movable Feast, a recent community-based public art project on the subject of "food," carried out in collaboration with *Nuestras Raíces* and *Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council*, becomes all the more pertinent in light of this aesthetic-political understanding of the practice of community economies. *Movable Feast* poses the question of the redistribution of abilities at the regional scale of western Massachusetts, with its broader racialized and classed division of labor and pattern of consumption, literally in the form of an artistic practice (Krupczynski 2011). The project was initiated when the artist, Joseph Krupczynski, began to collaborate with *Nuestras Raíces* and the *Policy Council* on the refashioning of a food trailer as a mobile market/kitchen to "address healthy food access in Holyoke's underserved neighborhoods" (407). Here we see a specific instance of *Nuestras Raíces*' principle of matching up abilities with projects that need doing, i.e., the artist bringing his ability to design, the cooks providing the menu, others providing bureaucratic know-how, and so on. *Movable Feast* has also aimed at not only the creation of a new need ("healthy food"), but also a new way of making visible and sensible another picture of

the diverse economies of food. They decided "to include non-Holyoke sites throughout western Massachusetts in its inaugural run":

> This expanded regional range also allowed us to link many community-supported food practices *across a wide spectrum of need and privilege*–from slow-food supporters and local farmers markets to food justice advocates. (Krupczynski 2011, 408; emphasis added)

The seven stops of *Movable Feast* were a University campus, a harvest festival, two farmers markets, housing projects, a cooperative bookstore, and a community based after-school program. In expanding its range like this, *Movable Feast* has linked together truly diverse (ethnically, economically, occupationally, and so on) community economies of the Pioneer Valley. In creating a new sense of community, through a redistribution of the way we make sense of community spaces and class habituses, *Movable Feast* has challenged the racialized and classed partitioning of laboring, health and consuming practices, problematizing for the community economy project the matter of differences in abilities at a new social scale.

Beyond Optimism: diverse economies as a Communist episteme

To conclude we would like to show how the preceding discussion helps us to address one of the common and somewhat ambivalent characterizations of the work of Gibson-Graham and the Community Economies Collective as "optimistic." Some commentators take the celebratory tone of embracing this work as assuming an emotionally hopeful and positive outlook towards the world. Others take the critical, even accusative, stance of attributing to this work a disposition for voluntarism, for assuming the position of an intentional subject who is able to dictate into existence what she enunciates in language. Some enlist support for this critique by pointing to what they find to be an absence of discussion of antagonism and conflict among the various economic relations that the diverse economies project draws out. This they read as a sign that Gibson-Graham and colleagues are unrealistically leveling the unevenness of power within the economic field, and, in particular, paying little attention to the dominance of institutionalized structures of power in their "optimistic" quest to dislodge the necessity of capitalism.

While the diverse economies approach at times mobilizes the idea of hope, this, we think, in no way implies that this project is about positive thinking or a moral orientation to find something good to hold onto and cherish even in the worst situations. The charge of voluntarism

addressed at the diverse economies research program and the politics of post-capitalist community economies is mistaken insofar as it confounds the categories of the discursive and speech with idealism and intentionality respectively. More importantly, this charge misrecognizes the position of the diverse economies project by making it an issue of individual choice between the two psychological mindsets of pessimism versus optimism. What is at stake in this project is not a moral subjective preference which, as if looking at the world *from outside*, clothes a different perception over the existing economic reality. Rather than an external optimistic attitude towards a given configuration, the diverse economies approach offers a partial relation internal to the given configuration that at the same time re-constitutes it. It is the "partial" and "partisan stance" of looking *from within* an irreducible antagonism that divides the given configuration of economy *out* towards creating an ethical space of collective decision making and performing economic interdependencies—what Gibson-Graham calls *community economies*.[15]

In simple terms, this irreducible antagonism refers to the fact that the subject cannot know, enjoy and "say it all" about Economy, not because the subject's knowledge remains deficient in comparison to a perfectible object, but because the subject is divided and the object lacks a ground. Instead of delivering a most convenient response to this problem of epistemic groundlessness through erecting its own moral economy, the diverse economies project assumes a radically different route and enacts a decided shift of position from one of morality—an a priori judgment about whether a practice is valued as good or bad (Gibson-Graham 2006, 98)—to an ethics of conduct. This ethics of conduct involves taking each economic transaction and practice, one by one, step by step, as a possible site of struggle and ethical decision-making, as "a (problematic) resource for projects of *becoming*, a place from which to build something more desirable…" (98). In positing no a priori judgment about the value of any transaction and practice, the diverse economies project forces us to inquire into the specific conditions of any economic activity before we can advocate or oppose it.

What emerges from this epistemic break is nothing less than a new space for making sense of economy, an outcome that is perhaps best and most lucidly materialized in the "alternative

[15] In this formulation, we liberally borrow from the argument developed by Alenka Zupancic (2008, 130-31). Although her object of critique (e.g., conventional views on comedy and tragedy) is different, the way she distinguishes the "psychological attitude" (looking at a certain configuration of antagonism *from out*) from the "partisan stance" (looking *from inside* a certain configuration of antagonism *out*), has influenced the way we conceptualize the diverse economies project as a relation to antagonism.

market, alternative paid, and alternative capitalist" cells in the diverse economy framing. Contrary to a spontaneous reading that would perceive these cells as the restricted space of "already existing alternatives" (sandwiched below formal market transactions, waged labor and capitalist enterprises and above nonmarket transactions, unpaid labor and noncapitalist enterprises) in an otherwise complete economy, we insist on reading it as the appearance of an orientation that treats the economy as a space of "non-all", in the sense that there is no all, neither an omnipresent capitalism, nor a complete communism, to which the "alternative space" of diverse economies would constitute a meager exception. In refusing such a position of exception, the diverse economy generates an epistemic space in which the partial identity of each economic activity is rendered visible and made available for potential assertions of the communist axiom and constructions of community economies.

It is impossible not to notice the similarity between the mapping practices of the diverse economies and the *Moveable Feast*. Just as the truck of the *Moveable Feast* creates a new space through intersecting social positions, communities, practices and places where such encounters were not conceivable before, the diverse economy expands the boundaries of economy and makes it possible to intersect in community economies what once felt like incompatible economic practices and relations. Both make an impossibility appear and reconfigure the way we experience sociality. Optimism can serve as a kind of morality which, through passing a positive judgment for the whole of economic phenomenon, obstructs the path of desire and absolves one from encountering the antagonism of conducting oneself in a non-all (inconsistent, immanent) space. The diverse economies project breaks with this sense of optimism and instead engages in the risky, laborious and yet pleasurable responsibility of conducting oneself in a partial field of experimentation.

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