

Cultivating hybrid collectives: research methods for enacting community food economies in Australia and the Philippines

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Abstract

Across the globe, groups are experimenting with initiatives to create alternatives to the dominant food system. What role might research play in helping to strengthen and multiply these initiatives? In this paper we discuss two research projects in Australia and the Philippines in which we have cultivated hybrid collectives of academic researchers, lay researchers and various nonhuman others with the intention of enacting community food economies. We feature three critical interactions in the 'hybrid collective research method': gathering, which brings together those who share concerns about community food economies; reassembling, in which material gathered is deliberately rebundled to amplify particular insights; and translating, by which reassembled ideas are taken up by other collectives so they may continue to do work. We argue that in a climate changing world, the hybrid collective research method fosters opportunities for a range of human and nonhuman participants to act in concert to build community food economies.

Keywords:

Research methods; action research; actancy; hybrid collective; community economies

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[There is] the possibility that agency is an emergent property. That to be an agent ... is a form of action that derives from an arrangement. That, by themselves, things don't act. Indeed, that there are no things "by themselves." That, instead, there are relations, relations which (sometimes) make things.

Michel Callon and John Law 1995, pp. 484-485

Introduction

Experiments with building community food economies are on the rise. There are those that connect food producers and consumers more directly, such as community supported agriculture, farmers markets, food cooperatives and even community gardening and self-provisioning. There are ethical fair trade and direct trade networks that are growing and expanding their reach, drawing more and more regions of the globe together via supply chains that support not only consumers but producers and their environments. Land is being reclaimed for food production in both rural and urban areas all over the world, whether by large social movements such as the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra), or piecemeal negotiations to access unused city blocks. More and more farmers are experimenting with agroecology, eschewing the oil intensive production techniques of industrial agriculture. New community-based social enterprises are making inroads into the agri-food production sector. All these experimental initiatives are building what we call 'community food economies' in which the interdependence between humans, and humans and the non-human world is foregrounded and concerns for co-existence are ethically

negotiated.¹ In community food economies, arrangements allow for collective and planetary interests to be put before private profitability and unbridled growth.

Given the volume of grass roots experimentation it is important to ask what role social science research can play in helping to support and strengthen these community food economies? Clearly one important role is to use our research skills to uncover, document and report on new food initiatives. The explosion of literature on ‘alternative’ food in sociology, human geography and anthropology, for example, is ample evidence that this role is being well enacted (e.g. Maye *et al.* 2007, Lewis and Potter 2011). Another academic contribution is to offer evaluative judgements about the viability of these new food experiments (e.g. Guthman 2008, Pudup 2008). Often this critically oriented research analyses the ‘success’ of initiatives in terms of the degree of ‘alternative-ness’ from the mainstream markets and capitalist enterprises that characterise what is seen as the dominant food system (itself another focus of academic research, e.g. Pritchard and Fold 2005, Clapp 2012).

While acknowledging the significant contributions of these revelatory and critical research roles, we are drawn to a different mode of critical inquiry that is less about tapping into pre-existing knowledge or evaluating current efforts and more about the potential for new knowledge and practices to emerge from the research process itself. For many, a global capitalist food system appears to be stubborn and inflexible, powerfully locked into a position of dominance through the practical tools of supermarket shelves, combine harvesters, feedlots, high calorie fast food diets and genetically enhanced crops. As researchers can we help to clear space for community food economies to emerge and develop their own forms of durability? In such a framing, the critical researcher might not be:

the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is ... the one for whom, if

something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution. (Latour 2004, p. 246)

Drawing inspiration from the work of actor network scholars including Callon (e.g. 1999), Latour (e.g. 2007) and Law (e.g. 2004), we are interested in the role that research might play in fostering and caring for new community food economies.

Our approach has its roots in participatory and action research, but where PAR tends to work with the vulnerable and marginalised and have an emancipatory focus (e.g. see the chapters in Kindon *et al.* 2007), we introduce an action research method that works on matters of shared concern with pre-existing collectives to foster emergent possibilities. This method builds on our elaboration of a poststructuralist version of PAR (Cameron and Gibson 2005) in which we highlight the performative role of language and representation in shaping identity and subjectivity, and the ways that embodied shifts in subjectivity allow for new economic practices to be enacted. In this paper, we reflect on a deliberate attempt to recognise human and nonhuman participants in the action research process and to see ‘actancy’ as not the sole privilege of humans. We explore how the relational networks of hybrid collectives act, albeit in ways we cannot anticipate (Callon and Law 1995).

Hybrid *collectif* is the term Callon and Law use to capture arrangements of “materially heterogeneous bits and pieces,” including humans (1995, p. 489). In the research context, the idea has been taken up by Callon and Rabeharisoa (2003) to discuss how a hybrid collective has emerged in France around research on muscular dystrophy (MD), with the effect of improving immensely the quality of life for people with MD. The heterogeneous grouping includes specialist medical researchers, “researchers in the wild” (2003, p. 200) who are primarily members of the French Association of Muscular Dystrophy (which includes people with MD, and friends and families) and a variety of nonhuman actants (which includes everything from transgenic mice to prosthetic limbs) (see also Gibson-

Graham and Roelvink 2009, Roelvink 2010, Hill, 2013). In this heterogeneous grouping, human and nonhuman actants exert influence, pushing and pulling the research process in various ways. The researcher's intention is one of those things exerting influence but it is not the only thing at work (and indeed research intentions are both products of earlier collective efforts and something that continues to be pushed and pulled in ways that researchers do not 'control').

We propose that a 'hybrid collective research method' involves many interactions. In this paper we focus on just three: *gathering* heterogeneous human and nonhuman bits and pieces together; *reassembling* what emerges from gathering into arrangements that help to make (sense of) the world; and *translating* what has been reassembled in ways that extend well beyond the original intent. We discuss pivotal moments from two research projects that highlight these three interactions. It must be noted that we did not enter into these projects already thinking that these interactions were key to a hybrid collective research method; rather, they have emerged retrospectively as we have reflected on our various research practices in light of the theorisations of scholars such as Callon (1999), Latour (2007) and Law (2004). Similarly, we did not enter into previous action research 'knowing' about the three moments of a post-structuralist informed PAR project (identity and subjectivity, language and representation, and politics). This suggests to us that the elaboration of new research methods involves initially, at least, a retrospective reordering of something that unfolds in a messy and unpredictable fashion. The task of distinguishing particular interactions codifies them so that they can be applied in future research projects.

One of the projects we discuss is based in Newcastle, Australia and has a community garden focus. The second is based in various provinces of the Philippines and includes an array of community food experimentation. Although in very different locations and contexts both projects share the intention of fostering and caring for new community food economies,

and an approach that has been cross-informed through joint discussion, reflection and, at times, participation. In the first section we introduce the two research projects. This is followed by discussions of gathering, reassembling and translating.

Hybrid Collectives Fostering Community Food Economies in Australia and the Philippines

The Newcastle Community Garden Project could be seen as starting with a travelling workshop held over two Fridays in May 2010. *Community* gardeners, mainly from newly formed community gardens, travelled together on a mini-bus to visit each other's gardens and to learn from each other's practices. Each of the community gardens was already a hybrid collective variously made up of children, chickens, citizens, carrots, commitments, compost, commons and computers along with microbes, rainfall, secateurs, seeds, fences and so on. These actants come together in various ways to produce emergent effects—different kinds of fruits and vegetables, the comings and goings of insects and weeds, relationships between gardeners, systems for watering and so on. Research was already occurring within these hybrid collectives: gardeners were experimenting with different types and placement of plants; insects were smelling and tasting for the sweetest flowers; weeds, even, were testing out which parts of the garden are conducive for colonising.

The Newcastle Community Garden Project aimed to enlarge the hybrid collective that comprised each garden by introducing community gardeners to each other, as there had been little interaction between the community gardens and gardeners in Newcastle. Thus the research was designed to help to build a network that would last well beyond the very short life of the research project, and more broadly to help strengthen the growing community food economy in Newcastle which includes experiments in community gardens, community kitchens and community supported agriculture.² The project also aimed to add to existing

research endeavours, including the research that community gardeners were already undertaking in their gardens and the specific interest the academic researcher (Jenny) had in learning about and bringing to visibility the range of economic practices that community gardens were using, with a particular focus on what ethical concerns come into play in decisions about economic practices. At each garden there were short presentations from community gardeners (in response to a series of prompts Jenny had emailed them earlier), followed by discussion. Then there was time set aside for gardeners to wander around each garden taking note of what was in place and chatting with each other about what they were observing. A third aim was to communicate the things learned to other community gardeners beyond those involved in the travelling workshop. Thus as part of the workshop, the formal presentations and discussions were audio-recorded and photos were taken with a view to using this material for some sort of web-based communication.

The design of the workshop built upon earlier research projects concerned with imagining and enacting community economies that also involved hybrid collectives of academic and researchers in the wild (chiefly local residents and members of community-based organisations). Bus trips had proven invaluable as a means of being exposed to new ideas and new possibilities in participatory action research in the Victoria and Queensland (e.g. Cameron and Gibson 2005). Presentations from and discussions with community members had proven helpful as a means of exploring shared “matters of concern” (Latour 2004, 225) in focus group and workshop-based research in Victoria and New South Wales (e.g. Gibson *et al.* 1999). These projects had been influenced by other projects, including action research with women in the coal fields of Central Queensland (Gibson-Graham 1994). This brief ‘genealogy’ is meant to highlight how research projects do not necessarily have neat starting and end points but are moments in “chains of translation” (Callon and Law 1995, 501).

The Philippines Growing Community Food Economies Project was similarly an outgrowth of a complex genealogy of previous projects (including some referred to above) concerned with creating alternative development pathways (e.g. Gibson *et al.* 2010). The project we focus on here included a range of research activities in northern Mindanao and Metro Manila between 2008 and 2011 conducted as part of Ann's doctoral research (Hill, 2013).

A key event was the Growing Community Food Economies Workshop organized by Ann, co-facilitated by Ann and Katherine, and held in Cagayan de Oro at Xavier University in 2009. Forty-two academic and lay researchers gathered for this three day live-in workshop. Days were spent in formal presentations and discussion interspersed with workshop activities, walks to the on-campus demonstration garden sites and field visits to two peri-urban gardens in the adjoining city. There were also many opportunities for informal discussion over meals and during walks around the agricultural college campus.

The guiding idea for this regional workshop had been sparked in a conversation twelve months earlier between Ann and Robert Holmer, an agronomist (then based at Xavier University) who was running the Peri-Urban Vegetable Project (PUVeP) which involves ten garden sites in metro Cagayan de Oro and one on-site at Xavier University.³ Ann was in the area as part of a crew filming stories of social enterprises developed independently by a Philippines-based NGO, Unlad Kabayan Migrant Services Inc., and as part of the Community Partnering for Local Development project,⁴ which included Unlad Kabayan as a partner organisation (Gibson *et al.* 2009). Ann had been in email contact with Robert Holmer, and one of the film crew, Jojo Rom, had been trained in agronomy by Robert (and had subsequently developed an integrated multi-enterprise farm, FamDev, that was funded by migrant savings and managed by Unlad Kabayan). Once Jojo and Ann discovered their

shared connection to Robert they were keen to make a hurried detour so they could visit Jojo's mentor and introduce Ann to her correspondent.

One of the topics of Ann and Robert's first face-to-face conversation was how to more strongly connect the ten gardens established by PUVeP, and more broadly how to conceptualise and enact more networked community food experiments that might have the capacity to emerge as a durable and identifiable community food economy. The conversation culminated in plans for a regional workshop that would bring many heads together to begin the process of enacting connection. What would come out of such a gathering, no-one could predict. But Ann and Robert were confident that something would emerge from gathering around shared concerns for food security and the wellbeing of both humans and nonhumans.

Hybrid Collective Research Interactions

In this section we discuss three interactions that we identify as critical to the hybrid collective research method and we feature four vignettes that provide insight into these interactions. The interactions involve various degrees of intentionality and control over outcomes. Here we understand intentionality (and control) in similar terms to Bennett (2010) who describes intentionality as always being in "competition and confederation with many other strivings" and something that can both affect and be affected (p. 32). As a result outcomes are always in variance with initial intentions. *Gathering* we suggest involves bringing together human and non-human actants with a high degree of intentionality in terms of what might result, but little control over what the actual outcomes might be. *Reassembling* involves both a high degree of intentionality and control of what gets produced. *Translating* involves a hopeful orientation towards what effects might emerge, but no way of enforcing any particular intention or control. As Hinchliffe (2007) notes, some practices are louder and more organised than

others, and for all our best intentions we have little control over what happens when things are let loose in this world (see also Law 2004).

Gathering

To gather is to bring 'to-gether'. To relate. To pick (as with a bunch of flowers). To meet together. To flow together. To have, as the Quakers put it, a 'gathered' meeting for worship. To build up or add together (as with a gathering storm, or gathering darkness, or a gathering boil).

John Law 2004, p. 100

Newcastle, Australia, 2010.

On a hot Sunday morning in a southern hemisphere January, a group of community gardeners in Newcastle take a ten-minute breather from weeding, planting and composting. We're sitting in the dense shade of the trees that give Fig Tree Community Garden its name. I'm next to Craig Manhood, the community garden Coordinator. Craig and I first met eighteen months before when he came to a workshop on community enterprises that I had organised around a visit by John Pearce from the UK.⁵ We start chatting about how things are going in the garden and at the University. Craig tells me that the garden has just received funding from the local council to run a series of gardening workshops, including some to support the new community gardens that are proliferating in Newcastle. I tell Craig that I've just received a small research grant from the University to investigate community economy initiatives. This is an 'AHA! moment'. What if we combine our shared concerns? What if the workshops for the new community gardens are joined up with the investigation of community economy initiatives? What if we turn expectations about expertise and research on their head and position the new community gardeners as already having expertise that they can share

with the other community gardeners and with academic researchers? What if this expertise is exchanged not through formal workshop presentations but 'in the field', through a bus trip to each other's community gardens? Ideas and possibilities are sprouting faster than the rocket (arugula) that's bolting before our eyes. "Wow!", I think, "In the space of a few minutes, we've moved from general chit chat into a serious discussion about research practice". It's a moment of becoming, of germinating the new.

From this serendipitous conversation an invitation went out to the community gardens in Newcastle (and some that were yet to secure sites and start gardening), and over two Fridays in May 2010 twenty-two community gardeners (including Jenny and Craig) gathered to visit each other's gardens. The field trip certainly brought human actants together, but non-human actants were also involved. In the cramped space of the mini-bus, strangers got to know each other. In the spaces of the gardens, the plants, trees, garden beds, pathways, compost heaps and worm farms elicited responses. A healthy-looking lemon tree prompted discussion about the best ways of looking after citrus. Leaves were passed around to be smelt and tasted. The design of pathways and garden beds, and the set-up of composting systems and worm farms were seriously studied. A new hybrid collective was taking shape with the resultant effect that knowledge about community gardening was also being gathered.

As the collective visited each of the gardens it quickly became evident that there was no one 'best' community garden model. Each garden was appreciated as itself an emergent effect of the heterogeneous bits and pieces that constituted it—the land tenure arrangement, the requirements of partner organisations, the site characteristics, the relationships between the gardeners involved, and the sources of funding.⁶ As a result, some were based on individual allotments, others involved communal gardening. Some were fenced and could only be accessed by unlocking gates, others were unfenced and open to all and sundry. Some

were based on an arrangement with the local council, some had partnerships with other organisations (such as a church and a bowling club), and one was a guerrilla garden on ‘no-man’s land’.

Jenny was particularly attuned to comments about ethical issues and dilemmas in each community garden and in the discussion that followed the short presentations she prompted gardeners to reflect more on the ethical concerns that shaped their gardens. People expressed concern about how we live and how the survival work we do is interconnected with the well-being of others (human and non-human).⁷ Gardeners talked about changing attitudes and practices towards how food is sourced and eaten by encouraging self-provisioning and food-gifting on the one hand and challenging the ‘corporate machinery’ on the other—or as one gardener put it “chip[ping] away at changing the way we live” (NCGP 2010, 1). Discussions about what to do with surplus produce were particularly revealing. At some gardens surplus was being taken by people who were not members (for example, by people who irregularly wandered through and picked whatever they wanted or by people who more systematically went through the garden and took large quantities of produce). Gardeners talked of how they made the ethical move to reframe unauthorised taking as a gift for non-members. By contrast, in some gardens surplus produce was not being taken and was rotting. Here gardeners talked of strategies that could be used to make the surplus gifts of the garden more visible so that anyone could access the free food that was available. Strategies included blackboard messages to let people know what to take, and signs in the garden that said ‘Pick me’ (as well as signs that helped to inform and guide people, for example ‘Not ready yet’ or ‘Leave for seed’).

Over the course of the two days, discussion moved backwards and forwards around these ethical concerns, and gardeners in their various ways gathered the knowledge and know-how that was emerging from the hybrid collective. A participant later reflected:

One of the great benefits of the process for me was that having a sympathetic and knowledgeable audience greatly facilitated my own attempt to articulate what it was that we were actually doing building a community garden—what exactly were the benefits to ourselves and to others in the community? And it also helped to identify what issues we had to think through and how we had managed these issues. (Chris Everingham, personal communication, 1 August 2010)

The Growing Food Economies Workshop in Cagayan de Oro marshalled a large and heterogeneous group of academic and lay researchers together who were already involved in existing hybrid collectives. Some clearly identified as researchers, or at least as being involved in research-related projects of one form or another. For example, there were academics and gardeners from the Peri-Urban Vegetable Project (PUVeP). There was a group of academic, community and NGO researchers from the Community Partnering for Local Development Project. There were officials from local municipalities in Northern Mindanao, and agro-ecologists, sanitation scientists and assorted social scientists all of whom were involved in experimental projects. There were also participants who did not see themselves as researchers, including members of a People's Organisation who were simply interested in techniques for gardening in small containers that could be passed on to their membership in flood prone squatter settlements. Against this backdrop of diversity, a group of forty-two gathered for discussion and reflection on a complex, but shared matter of concern—how to build a regionally networked community food economy.

In the research moment of gathering, anticipation is high. We don't know what, if anything, will result. The new hybrid collectives in the Philippines and Australia had been intentionally gathered together to initiate or strengthen community food economies, but what would emerge from this interaction was anyone's guess. As researchers we need to adopt a stance of openness so we are ready for possibilities to arise, especially those that realise our

research intentions and start to make fragile, imaginative constructions of the new more durable. Reassembling is another mode of hybrid collective interaction that can help to perform this realisation.

Reassembling

Method is not, I have argued, a more or less successful set of procedures for reporting on a given reality. Rather it is performative. It helps to produce realities ... it is also creative. It re-works and re-bundles ... and as it does so re-crafts realities and creates new versions of the world.

John Law 2004, p. 143

Newcastle, Australia, 2010.

It's a beautifully balmy evening in early December. About one hundred people have gathered at Fig Tree Community Garden for an outdoor screening of the Newcastle Community Garden Project's PlaceStories website and launch of the Community Garden Manifesto. A giant sail has been strung up as a screen and a portable projector is at the ready. The wood-fired oven has been lit up and the pizzas are flowing. The bar at the adjacent Croatian Sports Club is doing a roaring trade. As the sky darkens, there's a growing sense of excitement. The community gardeners are anticipating the first public screening of their stories and we're all waiting for the special guest, Costa Georgiadis, to arrive. At the time Costa was the presenter of Costa's Gardening Odyssey on SBS (Australia's 'multi-cultural' television station), well-loved for his enthusiastic and quirky style. Costa arrives. People ask to have their photo taken with him. He gets a couple of children to show him around Fig Tree as he eats his pizza. When they've finished the tour, Costa finds a child's plastic rocking horse to sit on and chats with a group of older gardeners. Finally, it's dark enough and the screening

can begin. The researchers breathe a collective sigh of relief as the music begins, the images roll and the voices of the community gardeners are heard loud and clear.

Within hybrid collectives things gathered can be deliberately reassembled. If gathering is an interaction full of uncertainty, as we don't know what will result, reassembling is where analytical skills come to the fore and where researchers have some degree of 'control'. This process contributes to emergent effects. Hybrid collectives, such as those formed through the Newcastle Community Garden Project and the Growing Food Economies Workshop, are generative sites of co-theorisation that can involve both academic and lay researchers.

The material presented on the PlaceStories website (see <http://ps3beta.com/project/7733>)⁸ involved reassembling elements from the initial gathering in order to produce a new digital output. Production started in the bus at the end of the first day of the travelling workshop when Jenny and Craig drew up a list of preliminary themes that had arisen. These were added to and refined after the second day of the workshop, with input from Jamie Pomfrett (the research assistant working on the project). Jenny and Jamie listened to the audio-recordings of the presentations and discussions at each garden. They extracted important fragments and reassembled these into a coherent script that included a story for each garden and fifteen themed discussions (including the 'The Politics of Community Gardening', 'Conflict in Community Gardens' and 'Give and Take in Community Gardens'). Draft scripts were sent to the community gardeners for their comments, and then they met one afternoon to record the script. Each gardener re-recorded the words they had originally uttered at different times across the course of the travelling workshop, and this became the voice-over for the PlaceStories website. At the suggestion of one community gardener, the scripts became the online Community Garden Manifesto (NCGP 2010).

The script reassembled snippets of material into a coherent sequence. With the re-saying of this script by the community gardeners a new version of reality was performed (Law 2004, 143). The PlaceStories website and the Manifesto present the material without question as the given reality of the event, but this reality has been re-crafted in order to amplify and transmit the various ways community gardens are negotiating and enacting a community food economy. Even for some of the community gardeners involved the reassembling and literal amplification of their words and voices is an important means of reframing and clarifying what they are doing, as one recounted twelve months after the launch:

Suddenly our words that we just raved on about on the bus trip - listening to them again [at the launch] was like “Wow, there was a lot of wisdom in what different people had said”. So that thing of taking your words and listening to them in a different context makes you realise that it’s part of a bigger movement.

As the following vignette shows, reassembling can also happen in the moment of gathering and is not only initiated by academic researchers.

Cagayan de Oro, the Philippines, 2009.

It’s the third day of the Growing Food Economies Workshop, and Ann starts by inviting participants to work in small groups to imagine how their initiatives might be supported through connections with other organisations or programs. Most groups concentrate on projects with specific concerns—expanding from ten the number of households involved in collective household-based container gardening, establishing a business so that 100 banana growers can sell their produce to local markets, organising urban gardens for 60 families who were survivors of a typhoon as a way of developing community resilience in a disaster prone area. Eddie Maape, an agricultural technician from the nearby Municipality of Opol,

arrives late to the session and then asks to work alone. Ann doesn't object, she is grateful for Eddie's enthusiasm. At the report back session Eddie stands up and outlines the Opol Food Project, tentatively using the unfamiliar language of a community economy that was introduced on Day One. He tells us about 76 community gardens spread over 96 neighborhoods in Opol Municipality where 350 communal gardeners grow food for their own survival and generate a surplus that supplies 500 meals a day to malnourished children in the local elementary schools. He mentions self-provisioning labor, volunteer labor and gifting as he outlines how the gardeners and 1,000 volunteers are involved in ethical interconnections and economic flows that address food security across a municipality of some 47,000 residents. Ann and Katherine look on with amazement as Eddie reassembles his know-how to present a working model for 'regional community food economy'.

Drawing on the workshop presentations about diverse economies and the ethical negotiations associated with community economies Eddie had begun to reassemble what he knew about a project which had been initiated by certain neighborhoods in Opol and then 'upscaled' with organisational direction from the Municipality in 2002 to reduce malnutrition and increase community resilience. As he sketched out the details of the Opol Food Project Eddie matched concepts with practices, theorizing ethical dynamics and their governance, pointing to weaknesses in the socio-technical agencement he was co-producing. In so doing, he highlighted how the hybrid collective of gardens brings together plots of private land temporarily released free of charge to be gardened, a complex system of zonal governance and volunteer time accounting, production schedules that ensure that each zone can supply the school feeding program for a week in sequence, self-provisioning and gifting of left-overs, techniques of waste segregation, recycling and seed propagation.⁹ At a later date Ann had the opportunity to re-present the Opol Food Project back to its mastermind, the ex-Mayor

of Opol, Dixon Yasay. Dixon was both amazed and stimulated by her reassembly of facts and practices that he knew only too well.

When new hybrid collectives are gathered together knowledge and know-how is showcased and bundled to produce some immediate insights, but there is an element of serendipity and even chaos. Reassembling, on the other hand, involves a more considered and deliberative taking apart and re-bundling of knowledge and know-how in order to produce a particular telling of the world. By the third day of the Growing Food Economies Workshop Eddie Maape was able to reassemble the discussion from the first day with his own insights to produce a coherent representation of an interconnected regional community food economy in Opol. For the Newcastle Community Garden Project the reassembling took place over a longer period of time but nevertheless resulted in the coherent representation of a community garden economy proliferating throughout Newcastle. These representations, once let loose in the world, take on a life and reality of their own as they are relayed and translated in ways well beyond the intention or control of those involved in the reassembling.

Translating

Callon: ... There isn't a reality on the one hand, and a re-presentation of that reality on the other. Rather there are chains of translation. Chains of translation of varying lengths. And varying kinds. Chains which link things to texts, texts to things, things to people. And so on.

Law: Chains which make the things, the texts and the people. Chains in which the making and the re-presenting cannot be distinguished. Except locally, and for certain purposes.

Michel Callon and John Law 1995, p. 501

Cagayan de Oro, the Philippines, 2009.

It's the start of the first day of the Growing Food Economies Workshop and participants have just sat through an opening prayer. Katherine rises to introduce the opening segment of the workshop in which the group will view a recently completed 50 minute DVD, Building Social Enterprises in the Philippines. Just a few days prior this DVD had had its Philippines launch in Jagna where some 50 community members had gathered to see themselves or their family members up on the big screen--except the hired data projector didn't work, and there was a power brown-out, so the much anticipated viewing took place on Katherine's laptop. Despite the conditions, those who could see and hear were captivated. Afterwards, one of the oldest (aged 75+), smallest, most vigorous and outrageously humorous members of the ginger tea producing social enterprise featured in the DVD rose to address the crowd. She had every one in stitches of laughter explaining her marketing strategy for selling the collective's products. "Ginger tea is good for pregnant women", she says. "It's good for any kind of nausea and", she says with gusto, "for the men it is good for - ". We can only imagine what she is saying in Visayan by the reaction of the crowd. The project that had started some five years ago was now over, but many of the enterprises live on, as do the countless stories the action research process engendered, each taking on a life of its own as it is retold and replayed. In Cagayan de Oro the DVD finally found its way to a big screen. Again the audience were excited to be seeing people like themselves taking economic development into their own hands. The more sedate discussion that followed focused on the variety of social enterprise organizational forms and their possible role in building regional community food economies.

In today's world, digital media offers a potent means for broadcasting stories of community food economies and their ethical drivers. These digital actants have the capacity to become

parts of new hybrid collectives with on-going emergent community economy effects. When the conscious interactions of one hybrid collective appear to cool off, when the human chatter dies down and the resource flows connecting people and places dry up, non-human actants can continue working to form chains of translation between texts/things/people.

Over the years, we have been drawn to this potential of digital actants to continue to produce effects long after each research project is over. We have developed online resource kits and manifestos, DVDs and CDs, YouTube videos and several websites. We can trace some of the chains of translation of these outputs through our own research projects. For example, we can trace how the online resource kit that was based on action research in regional Australia in 1999/2000, *Shifting Focus* (Cameron and Gibson 2001), was used in peri-urban Australia in 2004/5 in a project that resulted in the YouTube video, *It's In Our Hands* (Cameron 2005). And how *Shifting Focus* and *It's In Our Hands* were then used in action research in the Philippines (and Indonesia, where *Shifting Focus* was translated into Bahasa Indonesia) that resulted in the *Building Social Enterprises in the Philippines* DVD (Gibson et al. 2009) and the *Community Partnering for Local Development* CD (Gibson 2010) and website (see <http://www.communitypartnering.info/>). The DVD, CD and website are currently being used in Western Sydney to help in social enterprise development.

Other chains of translation are more difficult to trace. We can access fleeting glimpses of the work these actants are doing. For online materials we can generally identify how many times materials have been visited and sometimes even where in the world viewers are located, but we can't tell *how* the outputs are being used and the sorts of emergent effects they might be contributing to. For us this is not a problem. We understand that outputs will have impacts and produce possibilities that we can't predict. For example, the PlaceStories website is reportedly used by real estate agents in Newcastle to 'market' certain neighborhoods in the vicinity of each garden and promote house sales. It's easy to be

sceptical, but perhaps this real estate strategy may help to strengthen community gardens by attracting purchasers who will join up as members to become part of the hybrid garden collectives. We also know that PlaceStories is being used as a resource by groups wanting to set up community gardens, and as a ready reference and source of validation by gardeners themselves. As one gardener commented: “I direct people there, especially when I’m kind of bragging about all the community gardens we have here in Newcastle ... ‘I’ll say, Look it up. You’ll see the story of a lot of different gardens and different ways of doing things.’”

But digital actants are only one of the non-human or more-than-human members of hybrid collectives. Increasingly in our climate changing world extreme weather events become less-welcome actants in hybrid collectives. In our Philippines research three typhoons, over the course of five years, have helped to consolidate or initiate chains (or perhaps networks or webs) of translation. Typhoon Reming that devastated the province of Bicol in 2006 prompted formation of a People’s Organization (PO) to deal with livelihood support in its destructive aftermath. Through Unlad Kabayan members of this PO had learnt about container gardening and social enterprise development and were keen to experiment with rebuilding livelihoods and re-establishing food security. Two members of this organization then participated in the Growing Community Food Economies workshop. Soon after the workshop, typhoon Ondoy hit the northern part of the Philippines and Jojo Rom was called on by Unlad Kabayan to help with livelihood support in Manila. As identified earlier, Jojo had been trained by Robert Holmer and had worked as film crew on the making of the *Building Social Enterprises in the Philippines* DVD. He had also featured digitally at the Growing Community Food Economies workshop talking on the DVD about the integrated multi-enterprise farm, FamDev. Once in Manila, Jojo experimented with developing a cluster of social enterprises modelled on FamDev, mobilising the ‘assets’ the typhoon had gifted to the community of Banaba—silt, sand, recyclable waste and compensation payments to

develop social enterprises that fed off each other's outputs (Hill and Rom 2011). Recyclable waste in the form of used juice tetra-packs were made into tetra pot containers, silt was collected and mixed with sand to make potting mix, edible leaf greens were grown to be eaten and sold in local markets. In the aftermath of another typhoon, Sendong, in December 2011, the Municipality of Opol sought guidance about re-establishing food production in poor communities whose livelihoods had been devastated by flooding from Jojo and other members of the hybrid collective gathered at the Growing Food Economies Workshop. Having worked with both Unlad Kabayan and PUVeP, Jojo is now engaged in an ongoing research collaboration with Ann that has seen him travel to Australia to jointly present with her on community food economies at the Australian National University and other academic research gatherings. Through these chains of translation the regional community food economies tentatively theorised at the Growing Community Food Economies workshop have become a feature of collective experimentation in post-disaster situations. It is as though a new community economy agencement is being made more durable in a context where environmental destruction is undoing the materiality of development as we have known it.

Conclusion

In our climate and resource changed world we must seriously consider what economic food futures we are going to advocate, and how, as researchers, we are going to help participate in bringing these futures into being. In this paper we have shown how a hybrid collective research method might contribute to fostering community food economies in which the interdependence between humans and between humans and nonhumans might be more ethically negotiated. These endeavours might seem small; however, we see them as being like pebbles thrown into a pond producing ripples and reverberations that will contribute not to a massive overhaul or revision of a seemingly dominant food system but to the multiplication

and proliferation of small-scale endeavours that amass through what Healy has termed “a geography of ubiquity” (2009, p. 341; see also Cameron and Hicks 2013).

We have been interested to explore how research undertaken in this vein might also take seriously the proposition at the outset of the paper that ‘things’ do not act by themselves; rather, things act in arrangement with others--even that there are no ‘things’ by themselves, there are only relations. In a deliberate step to distribute more widely the capability for action usually afforded only to humans, we have, following Callon and Law (1995), defined hybrid collectives as heterogeneous materials and relations that act. We have argued that as participants in hybrid collectives, academic researchers have opportunities to act in concert with others--including lay researchers and nonhuman actants. In the Newcastle Community Garden Project the hybrid collective included gardens, gardeners, municipal legislations, a bus, a website, various technologies of communication, propagation and mobility and more. In the Philippines Growing Food Economies Project the collective included university research groups, NGO and municipal experiments, gardens, gardeners, typhoons, various technologies of recycling, and communication and more. We can see all these actants as collaborators in creating arrangements, or agencements, that in turn act.

Upon reflection on these two research projects, we have outlined three interactions that contribute to a hybrid collective research method. One interaction is the gathering of existing hybrid collectives around a shared ‘matter of concern,’ with a spirit of openness for what might follow. Reassembling is an interaction in which heterogeneous materials are pulled and shaped by many forces, including that of the researcher’s intentions. In the Newcastle Project this involved a deliberate process of reassembling material gathered from the collective with a view to letting the reassembled material loose in the world via new media so it might produce effects in other arrangements. In the Philippines project the newly gathered hybrid collective spontaneously reassembled in thought a regionally networked

community food economy that subsequently was performed, prompted in part by the nonhuman actancy of a climate changing weather system. The third interaction we identify is translation. We showed how chains of translation reverberating out from each project continue to have effects as the more durable elements of each collective—a community food economy discourse, human subjects who identify with a community economy ‘movement’, digital outputs and gardens, among others—join with other hybrid collectives that act, pulling and shaping that actancy. While the gathering, reassembling and translating moments of a hybrid collective research method might increase the chances of generating new emergent possibilities, they cannot dictate or determine them. Our method does not pretend to control ‘actancy’.

In our context of the Anthropocene, hybrid collectives are a means of repositioning and widening the politics of research interventions. Rather than seeing action research as producing ‘human fixers’ of economic and environmental crises we become hybrid collective ‘co-creators’ and ‘co-participants’ alongside others, part of ever-lengthening chains of things, people, resources and experimental ideas in association (Callon and Law 1995). Our hope is that the methods we outline might increase the chances of community food economies becoming more visible, more interconnected and thus more robust.

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¹ The concept of community food economies draws on Gibson-Graham's theorization of community economies (Gibson-Graham 2006; See also Gibson-Graham *et al.* 2013).

² For more on Newcastle's community food economy see Cameron (2012).

³ PUVeP had been running for many years prior. With funding from the Germany embassy, GTZ (German Agency for Technical Cooperation) and other EU bodies, the allotment gardens had become a demonstration site of best practice in urban agriculture in the majority world. For more on PUVeP, see Holmer and Drescher (2005).

⁴ The project was largely funded by an Australian Research Council Grant, LP 0347118.

⁵ John Pearce was a community and social enterprise pioneer who generously contributed his extensive knowledge and expertise. Sadly, John died on 12 December 2011.

⁶ For more on this appreciative stance see the feedback provided by the community gardeners after the travelling workshop discussed in Cameron (2011, pp. 502-505).

⁷ For more on these types of ethical concerns see Gibson-Graham *et al.* (2013).

⁸ PlaceStories is an open access, web-based digital story-telling technology (developed by Feral Arts with Australia Council funding). Still images are zoomed in on or scanned over to provide a visual story, and the images are accompanied by an overlay of voices and music.

⁹ For more on Opol's community food economy see Hill (2011).