

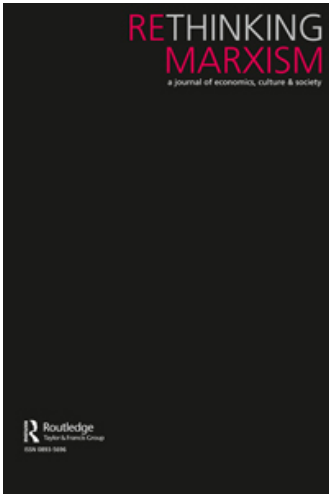
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Communism as a Mode of Life

Stephen Healy

This paper is based on a talk I delivered at Rethinking Marxism's 2013 international conference in conversation with Jodi Dean at a plenary session entitled "Crafting a Conversation on Communism." I attempt to clear up a point of confusion in Dean's reading of postcapitalist politics and the work of the Community Economies Collective (of which I am a member) in order to arrive at a point we share in common: the immanent relevance of communism to contemporary politics, as evidenced by Occupy and other events. While Dean reads the Occupy experience as a demonstration of the need to return to the party as an organizational form, I explore the potential of activist research and the solidarity economy for demonstrating communism as a practical, sensible reality in a growing number of communities. These emergent communisms grow in visibility as we develop other ways of representing and valuing communal life as we live it.

Key Words: Communism, Community Economy, Occupy, Politics, Postcapitalism

Communist Horizons

Jodi Dean (2012) begins *The Communist Horizon* with reflections on the ambiguity of the term horizon. It can refer to the spatial horizon: a distant point ahead of us that we chart our way toward. It can be a temporal horizon: a lost horizon behind us, with abandoned projects and ambitions. A third possibility is to use "communist horizon" not to recall a forgotten future but "to designate a dimension of experience immanent to us that we can never lose even if, lost in a fog or focused on our feet, we fail to see it." Dean (2012, 1–2) teaches us that "the horizon is Real in the sense of *impossible*—we can never reach it—and in the sense of *actual*."

This third definition is most interesting to me. It resonates with Nancy's (1991) insistence on the inescapability of our being-in-common, with Graeber's (2011) anthropological observations that our shared history as a species includes a long communalist moment, and that what we take to be a natural, universal economy—capitalism—can be seen as an aberration. Finally, it speaks directly to Madra and Özseltçuk's (2005) argument, following Žižek (2001), that class as a process—the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus—is the site of a constitutive antagonism. They too identify a Real in class, where the class process is a provisional resolution to an unending conflict over how to organize economy. In their view, communism means never having a final answer to the question of how to live in common.

Internalizing this vision of communism as immanent/Real allows us to practice a politics that accepts that there is no final answer to the question of how to live in communism. This idea is powerful, but like Dean, I also think the simple spatial metaphor of communism as something we are moving toward—a sensible, practical reality—is worth keeping in mind. Movement toward the communist horizon certainly means letting go of particular ideas of economic and political organization but also of the mundane habits, practices, desires, and self-conceptions that define our current mode of existence. To take up the simpler notion of the horizon, we need to get our bearings and find our way forward. Letting go of one way of organizing economy and practicing another, we should get a sense of where we are. We are in uncharted waters: our bearings read 70 by 400.

The coordinate 70 is supplied to me by Guy Ryder (2013), the secretary of the International Labor Organization, in relation to levels of youth unemployment globally. He asserts that youth underemployment in many parts of the majority (developing) world is around 70 percent. Development, as it has usually been practiced, has failed to create meaningful opportunities for most youth in many parts of the world. The situation of precarious labor is now endemic to both majority and minority world countries, as a formal economy coheres where many of us need it in order to survive, but where it no longer requires our services. Human communities around the globe have produced economies in which a great many of us are, to use Mike Davis's (2007) phrase, surplus humanity. I am reminded of this precarity at least three times a week when I get up and teach in front of a classroom full of first-generation university students at a state university—students who, with luck, will graduate with less debt than some others into a lifetime of precarious employment.

The coordinate 400 is brought to our attention by the paleoclimate community, who tell us that ambient atmospheric global CO₂ concentrations have reached 400 ppm, a concentration not seen in millions of years, and we will only come to understand the consequences of this as we live through it, for indeed we already are.¹ One of the more disturbing dimensions of this warming world is increased food insecurity. Ecologist George Woodwell (2014) pointed out in a recent address that the effects of climate change are a present reality, not just something that will be endured by our children's children. Among the most chilling observations he made was to point out that the significant drop in crop yields in Europe in 2003, Russia and Ukraine in 2010, and the United States in 2012 were largely an effect of extreme heat. When considered in relation to nearly four straight decades of decline in commodity crop yields internationally, the warmer world of the Anthropocene constitutes a different sort of precarity. It is not an exaggeration that what is at stake is the continuation of our species in the context of something that resembles civilization.

Recognizing that we are floating in uncharted waters, out of our depth, inflects how we can speak of a communist horizon. In my view, to be relevant, communist politics must address both economic and ecological precarity. To be a communist

1. See "What the World Needs to Watch," CO2Now.org, accessed 23 March 2015, <http://co2now.org/>.

should be to insist on a common solution to an economic system that marginalizes enormous numbers of people while laying waste to the commons—oceans, atmosphere, biosphere, and lithosphere. Whether we regard this as movement toward an unknown horizon or as an immanent contradiction, it means learning to live differently in an uncertain world. We can say what we think, we can take courage to be sure, and we can act, but these actions should be guided by an understanding that we haven't, as a species, been here before. Cognizance of this uncertainty should engender a productive mode of thinking and acting that is different than the self-assuredness associated with, for lack of a better term, a progressive-modernist view of history.

Roelvink and Gibson-Graham (2009), inspired by an assertion by the late ecofeminist writer Val Plumwood (2008), write that “we will go forward in a different mode of humanity or not at all.” They conclude that part of this new mode is to develop what Latour (2004a) refers to as a willingness to learn to be affected. If communism is to mean anything, it must mean embracing the Anthropocene: abandoning a homocentric conception of planetary well-being and learning to live in common with the biotic and abiotic forces that create conditions felicitous to life (Roelvink and Zolkos 2011).

Admitting to the inescapability of our being-in-common, learning to be affected by it, and understanding it intimately as an adaptive response to a climate-altered world are conceptual shifts that are both enabled and sustained by different ways of being in the world. Initially we might describe these new ways of being as more cooperative and less competitive, more geared to sufficiency than types of excess, less arrogant and maybe less directed by the belief that we *know* how things are. It is in this context that I would like to return to Gibson-Graham's concept of capitalocentrism, which refers to a deep belief that capitalism is an insuperable reality. In their view, the *certainty* of this belief is an impediment to the flourishing of other economies. At the time they coined the phrase, they felt that the anticapitalist Left in particular was gripped by capitalocentrism—specifically the belief that capitalism has become synonymous with economy itself, effectively subordinating both politics and culture to its reproduction as a system.

Postcapitalist Corrective

It is here that I would like to offer a corrective to Dean's analysis and to her characterization of Gibson-Graham's (2006) work, in which the term “postcapitalism” and references to capitalism as a discourse (capitalocentrism) signal an abandoning of the communist horizon, a settling for a compensatory project focused on economic diversity. What seems to be at stake is that, for Dean, recognition of economic difference precludes the possibility of recognizing the real inequities of capitalism. In contrast to viewing capitalism as a discourse, Dean (2012, 5–6) takes “the opposite position. The dominance of capitalism, the capitalist *system*, is material. Rather than entrapping us in a paranoid fantasy, an analysis that treats capitalism as a global system of appropriation, exploitation and circulation that enriches the few as it dispossesses the many *and* that has expended an enormous amount of energy in doing

so can anger, incite, and galvanize.” She goes on to say that Gibson-Graham’s proscription of “reading for difference” would have us ignore that difference and dominance can happily coexist.

But on the contrary, this is precisely their point. Gibson-Graham’s project does not deny the existence of the capitalist class process, of repressive and ideological state apparatuses, and of laws, norms, and desires that are assembled as a discourse composed of both ideas that matter and also matter (in the form of everyday practices) that serves to embody ideas. What Gibson-Graham insist upon is that this system is a discourse that coheres in part by enrolling our desires, habits, and practices (even of those of us on the anticapitalist Left), and that it is made possible when we live life by its measures and values. What they insist upon, following a reading of Marx, is that in every economy, in countries rich and poor, *capitalism is not all that there is*.

Gibson-Graham’s project is geographic; they chart and identify resources in the landscape that are other than capitalist—besides private ownership, conventional finance, wage labor, and market exchange, which might be made to cohere into a different econo-sociality. But that is not the end point. “Difference” is not a desired outcome in and of itself. It is rather a strategic starting place for thinking how we might move forward in a physical world more challenging than the geologic epoch of the Holocene, when civilization took root. Identifying the internal differences within capitalist organizations and markets, the location of communist enterprises, and states and social movements that take the commons seriously becomes the basis for a politics in which capitalism is present but is no longer synonymous with economy (or for that matter, with politics or society). It is in this sense, precisely, that a postcapitalist politics is enacted, because a beyond-capitalism becomes discernible.

Katherine Gibson (2013) has recently described the evolution of the work of the larger collective as a movement from a politics of language in which postcapitalism becomes visible to a politics of subjects in which it becomes possible to desire something other than capitalism to a politics of collective action in which other worlds become actually possible. It is here, I think, that there might be a partial theoretical reconciliation between postcapitalist politics and the political moment Dean sees inaugurated in the Occupy movement. In Dean’s description of Occupy, there seems to be a similar arc to that described by Gibson: a movement from recognition, to a different relationship with desire, to a capacity for action.

Dean (2012, 230–1) breaks this down into three steps:

1. Occupy encounters the lack in the big Other (that is, the incompatibility of capitalism with the people, the corresponding failure of liberal democracy precisely insofar as it is capitalism’s political form, and the overall decline of symbolic efficiency characteristic of communicative capitalism).
2. Occupy responds by asserting its own lack, whether as precarity (debt, unemployment, foreclosure), non-knowledge (no one really knows what to do or how to create a functioning egalitarian system of production and distribution), or incompleteness (the movement isn’t a whole or a unit; it’s composed of multiple, conflicting groups and interests). And,
3. Occupy names or represents the overlap of these two lacks.

Dean's formulation parallels the ends of psychoanalysis, in which analysands, in seeing the lack in the Other, no longer experience their own lack and incoherence as a sign of deficiency or as a reason for shame. In this moment, the analysand traverses the fantasies that had previously covered over this lack. It is this internal reconfiguration that allows for a new relationship with desire, in which even the possibility of trying and failing does not persuade the subject to cede desire. To a certain extent a communist politics might then be thought of as something that both enables and is sustained by the creation of these moments where the two lacks coincide.

This point is centrally important, so let me repeat it: with Occupy we have a recognition that the Other lacks. That they (the capitalists) have no idea what they are doing and that they have no idea what to do next is what gives us permission to not cede our desire for communism; even if the path to that communism is not clear to us, our own lack is no longer an excuse. But this process works because we can see that capitalism is not a "system." It does not cohere. As Resnick and Wolff (1987) have put it time and time again, it is a system that is always in crisis, and the history of the "capitalist class process" is an attempt at quelling the contradictions that its own approach to surplus appropriation engenders.

One might at this point object that if capitalism is always in crisis, why does it seem so solid even as it melts into thin air? How is it that so many of us, across the political system, seem convinced that capitalism is a system coextensive with economy itself, a system that has managed to subordinate both governance and culture in order to ensure its reproduction? To be sure, following Mitchell (2013) and the insights of actor-network theory, part of what gives capitalism durability are everyday material and symbolic practices, from practices of accounting and exchange to practices of self-conception. But following insights from psychoanalytic theory, the durability of what we call capitalism is also rooted in the imaginary. To say that capitalism has an imaginary dimension is not to deny its materiality but is to add a dimension, a register in psychoanalytic theory where discourse meets fantasy and enjoyment.

I would submit that what stands in the way of recovering an immanent communist horizon is this capitalist imaginary—an imaginary that imparts order to our economy, our relations to one another and to ourselves through fantasies. In the post-Lacanian tradition, fantasies work by papering over an intrinsic lack of coherence (in our own lives and in society), providing cohesion through a compensatory fantasy-narrative that explains our present unhappiness. Clinical experience shows that we tend to become aware of these fantasy frames when they no longer work to produce coherence. In Gibson-Graham's view, capitalocentrism's imaginary dimension papers over the constitutive antagonisms of the class process with fantasies of market equilibrium, with individuals expressing their preferences, with meritocracy, and much else besides. The coincidence of the two lacks, as Dean puts it, interrupts the coherence of this imaginary, opening up the possibility for a different framing of both economy and our relations to one another. The void that opens up as this fantasy is interrupted reveals that capitalism has never been all that there is.

What are the conditions of possibility for allowing the two lacks to coincide? Psychoanalytic theory's emphasis on timing is everything in this process of interruption. As Judith Butler (2010) wrote in her essay on economic performativity, the

analyst waits for those moments when the coherence of the patient's speech—about how mother ruined the analysand's life, for example—misfires, and in those moments it becomes possible to suggest other ways of looking at the situation, other frames for understanding. We have had this moment with Occupy, and even as it fades from memory, the work that Occupy accomplished in the United States was to return economic inequality, precarity, and class to political discourse in a way that was inconceivable just a few short years before. This is still our moment of interruption, and the question is, what do we do with it?

Research as Political Practice

Making use of Marxian theory, substantive anthropology, economic geography, and feminist theory, the point of the accompanying diagram is to chart an economic landscape that is variegated in terms of the kinds of enterprises, types of labor, modes of transactions, ways of exercising tenure, and means of finance that compose any economy (see [table 1](#)).

For example, in relation to diverse enterprises Gibson-Graham (2006) point out that it is presently possible to see multiple class processes at work—different ways of producing, appropriating, and distributing surplus, some that are desirable, like the communal form, and some that are not. There are contemporary instances of slavery, feudalism, and of course, capitalism. Capitalism itself is regarded as internally differentiated. Many mainstream capitalist corporations have internalized social, ecological, or economic concerns in relation to their governance. CEC members find this an interesting leverage point for thinking about how to follow Latour (2005) in admitting economic relationships—at the enterprise or other locations—as shared matters of political concern. Gibson-Graham (2006) and others in the CEC have described this process of ethico-political articulation as the formation of community economies.

Once more, the point of this reframing of economy as a site of intrinsic difference is not mere enumeration but is rather to envision the possibilities for conjugation. For example, Katherine Gibson (2013) supplied us with three examples of postcarbon solar industries that came into existence through a mobilization of the diverse economy drawing on alternative organizational forms, financial structures and labor practices to come into being. These initiatives also required intervention from the state. It is here that economic difference suggests not only a postcapitalist landscape, in which capitalism is not all, but also a postcapitalist governance, in which we might enact noncapitalist ways of organizing the economy.

Seeing things this way makes it possible to more effectively perform work as activist scholars, but it also changes the *practice* of being a politically engaged left scholar in ways that seem synchronous with calls—coming from many quarters for quite some time (see Sedgwick 2003; Latour 2004b)—for a different approach to scholarly practice. Instead of engaging in what James Ferguson (2009) describes as another round of denouncing neoliberalism, we can recognize that the project of “critique”—which, as Latour (2004b) puts it, has run out of steam and can play our part in constructing other worlds. The act of doing this scholarship itself, with others,

Table 1. Diverse Economy Diagram.

LABOR	TRANSACTIONS	PROPERTY	ENTERPRISE	FINANCE
Wage	Market	Private	Capitalist	Mainstream Market
<i>ALTERNATIVE PAID</i>	<i>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</i>	<i>ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE</i>	<i>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</i>	<i>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</i>
Self-employed	Fair trade	State-managed	State owned	Cooperative banks
Reciprocal labor	Alternative currencies	assets	Environmentally responsible	Credit unions
In-kind	Underground markets	Customary (clan) lands	Socially responsible	Community-based financial institutions
Work for welfare	Barter	Community land trusts	Nonprofit	Microfinance
		Indigenous knowledge (Intellectual property)		
<i>UNPAID</i>	<i>NONMARKET</i>	<i>OPEN ACCESS</i>	<i>NONCAPITALIST</i>	<i>NONMARKET</i>
Housework	Household sharing	Atmosphere	Worker cooperatives	Sweat equity
Volunteer	Gift giving	International waters	Sole proprietorships	Family lending
Self-provisioning	Hunting, fishing, gathering	Open-source IP	Community enterprises	Donations
Slave labor	Theft, piracy, poaching	Outer space	Feudal Slave	Interest-free loans

Source: Adapted from Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy (2013, 15).

is for the CEC a moment in which community economies—communism—begin to cohere.

I have come to see in the work of the CEC a bit of what Michael Hardt called for in a recent essay on Foucault’s work—a call to move beyond the Left’s project of critique. In looking for an alternative,

one place to start is with the forms of militant research that have emerged in recent years both inside and outside the academy, which understand the locus of theory and the production of knowledge as taking place primarily collectively in social struggles. What we need to articulate ... is theory as a form of biopolitical militancy that has the power to struggle against the life we are given and to make a new life, against this world and for another. Beyond critique’s ability to limit how much and in what way we are governed, this militancy opens up a new form of governance. (Hardt 2011, 33–4)

Hardt argues that if initially it is difficult to imagine a biopolitics that the Left would find desirable, it is because many continue to conflate biopolitics with biopower. They see only the governance of populations and conclude that our only

option is to be governed less. The militant biopolitical alternative Hardt articulates is part of an autonomous process in which communities of people come to govern themselves in ways that both produce and depend upon new understandings of ways of living, including innovative and communal ways of governing our work lives, enterprises, systems of exchange and investment, and management of commonwealths.

The following are examples of CEC work in collaboration with others to help enact noncapitalist and collective approaches to governing economic spaces:

- Using communal knowledge of ocean fisheries to develop a community-based management of open-ocean resources as an alternative to conventional biofisheries management (St. Martin 2001, 2006)
- Expanding networks of worker-owner cooperatives (Cornwell 2010)
- Mapping solidarity economy institutions as a means for facilitating their inter-relationships while working on campaigns at the local and state level to facilitate their efficacy (Bergeron and Healy 2014; Safri 2012, 2013; Shear 2014)
- Charting the means for communities in the Philippines to create more secure food systems in urban areas that are subject to an increasingly unforgiving climate (Hill 2011)
- Exploring with others the potential of alternative food systems in the United States (Harris 2009)
- Charting common management approaches to open-access resources in the former Soviet Union (Pavlovskaya 2013)
- Thinking about community economies as spaces for civic engagement (Miller 2013)
- Imagining and enacting noncapitalist futures in Berlin, Sydney, and elsewhere (Erdem 2014)

Many of these initiatives are focused on measuring, enabling, and facilitating communal forms of production, collective approaches to the management of resources, and alternative means for investing in a common future or for mitigating risk. These are really just a few of the projects, and while I do not mean to suggest that these projects by themselves represent a new politics, militant or otherwise, I do think they help us to recognize that these sorts of experiments are happening all over the world and that the attempt to produce new cooperative econo-socialities have, until now, escaped notice. It also means, for many of us, that we can teach and politically organize around communism as something sensible, desirable, practical, and already here, immanent to our experience.

The combination of collaborative research, the recognition of the thousand alternatives that have emerged with the end of Thatcher's TINA, and pedagogy is a formula for a militant biopolitics—a politics of collective action and collective governance. One of our more recent efforts as a collective, involving J. K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron, and myself, is a book entitled *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities* (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013), which continues work begun in *A Postcapitalist Politics*. We don't propose a political program or one right approach but rather hope our community of

readers will engage in their own forms of militant biopolitical research focused on ethico-political questions of how to live in common:

- In relation to work, what does it mean to survive well together and equitably?
- In relation to markets and other exchange spaces: how do we encounter others in ways that support their well-being and ours?
- How do we consume sustainably, minimizing draw-down finite planetary resources?
- How do we maintain, replenish, or grow our natural or cultural commons?
- How do we distribute surplus toward social or environmental ends?
- How do we invest our wealth so that future generations can live well?

Sincerely asking these questions and answering them in the context of collective research and action requires abandoning the internalized metrologies of neoliberal biopolitics, that little bird perched on our shoulder and instructing us in the metrics of loneliness—you are paid exactly what you are worth, you owe nothing to no one and no one is obliged to help you, the only property that matters is private, the debts you face and the security you crave are your responsibility. If Timothy Mitchell and other ANT theorists are correct that “capitalism” gets its reality by being embodied in everyday practices and metrics, living in common might be made more real in exactly the same way.

In the book we have designed, resuscitated, and appropriated a series of conceptual “tools” that allow us to take measure of our lives in a collective context as a precondition for collective action. One conceptual tool, familiar to Marxian theorists, is what we call a “people’s account” of the enterprise, and it is at the center of our chapter on taking back business (see [table 2](#)).

We highlight how, in community-based and cooperative enterprises, worker-owners and sometimes the larger community collectively appropriate the surplus that is produced and make decisions about what to do with it. In the cooperative enterprise in particular, the determination of what counts as “surplus” and what counts as payment for necessary labor is both an ethical and a political decision. While this may be guided by the ethical commitments of the cooperators, it is also shaped and conditioned by the larger society. The allocation of surplus is likewise shaped and constrained by both necessity and the values of cooperators. As Rick Wolff (2013) has noted, the politics of a worker-owned communist enterprise is different from that of a firm governed by a board of directors. Such workers are unlikely to offshore their own livelihoods, are more inclined to keep safe workplaces, are less likely to emit toxic pollutants, and so on. But like any collective effort, as both Dean (2012) and Madra and Özselçuk (2015) point out, this is not necessarily a harmonious affair.

Collective metrologies such as the people’s account allow us to become aware that our efforts are only a small part of something larger that is happening in different ways around the country and indeed across the world. One thing we may discover is that the politics of surplus is not confined to the enterprise. Another dimension to this ongoing militant biopolitics is connected to efforts by community groups to map noncapitalist enterprises, including worker cooperatives and also community-based credit unions, producer and consumer cooperatives, mutual aid groups, and

Table 2. Surplus versus Necessary Labor.

A People's Account of a Cooperative							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Hours of the Workday							
Survival Payment				Surplus Value			
Cooperators decide on survival payments (their wages), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wages set at a level that makes home ownership feasible for workers • 10% loading for essential workers Wages used for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food • Housing • Medical care • Schooling • Clothing • Savings 				Business Payments: In two to three hours, cooperators produce products equal to the value of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxes • Interest • Rent • Insurance • Accounting • Advertising • Retained earnings Cooperators decide to increase retained earnings to upgrade machinery and increase productivity		Collective Wealth Cooperators decide how to distribute their collective wealth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships for children's education • Environmental restoration projects • A fund to support the development of other cooperatives in the area 	

Source: Adapted from Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy (2013, 62).

alternative food and care systems that might be meaningfully connected to one another. The Brazilian solidarity economy movement has been doing this for a while, connecting more than 30,000 solidarity entities together into a collective polity capable of influencing local government and involving 3 million people in various ways (Tygel 2012).

Rick Wolff (2012) is likewise crafting a national politics around democratizing the enterprise. Gar Alperovitz (2013) is charting a similar course, looking at experiments like the Evergreen Cooperatives initiative in Cleveland, Ohio, and seeing in it a means for a municipal cooperative development that uses financing from community credit organizations and the demand for goods and services as a means for bringing new, larger-scale cooperatives into existence. This model—not without its problems, of course—is being replicated in Pittsburgh, Richmond, California, and Atlanta as well as in Springfield, Massachusetts, and it is in the beginning stages elsewhere in the country, including in Worcester, where I long resided. This suggests that a communist mode of life is closer at hand and is also perhaps more familiar than we might imagine, even in the United States. The work that is required is thus to enable more of us to practice a communist politics, and one part of that process is to produce systems of valuation and accounting—everyday habits and practices in which we answer the question of how to live in common. This is actually the hard work, but I think it is precisely where different ways of doing “research”—in the academy and,

as Latour would have it, in the wild—could prove invaluable to the development of a communist polity.

Conclusion

Given the moment of history we are in, with mounting economic and ecological precarity, human communities are faced with stark choices and no guarantees. One course to follow would be to pursue the logic of the privatization of formerly open-access resources—atmosphere and oceans—and to allow the concentration of wealth and income in the hands of fewer and fewer to continue unabated. In such a climate of precarity, it would become harder and harder to recognize social bonds, let alone to practice an ethics of interdependence. The alternative would be to build a society in which cooperation is the norm, in which people collectively participate in governing workplaces, households, communities, and municipalities, where surplus wealth is distributed equitably, and in which the open-access resources of atmosphere, ocean, and biosphere are treated as commons cared for by communities.

Pursuit of this path will require innovation. It will require new ways of understanding, measuring, and valuing. It will require technical knowledge guided by ethical principle in the context of good governance. Whether this communism is crafted through the formation of solidarity economies linking co-ops, environmentalists, social movement groups, local governments, and others into an alternative system of production and exchange or by means of a powerful political party, we will arrive at such a world through work, education, politicization, and persuasion. The task is enormous because our way of doing things is embedded in our current understanding of economy and governance, in our self-conceptions, and in the everyday practice of valuing our (economic) lives by those measures.

In my view, it is possible to help constitute a new reality through the development of different systems of measuring and valuing—the category of “surplus” is but one. Here, ironically, we might take comfort in the performative power of metrics. John Law (2009), for example, discusses early efforts to use the “Eurobar” (Eurobarometer) to collect the opinion of the average European Union citizen. Law points out, of course, that there is no typical European Union citizen and that the performative function of this survey is to constitute such an individual. Projects like the Eurobar are invested in the “transcendental logic” that such an individual’s preferences and beliefs reflect an imagined whole. This is, in my view, an example of biopower that aims to govern or, in this case, to constitute a population. Law concludes his essay on the Eurobar by describing a “baroque” alternative in which inquiry, surveying, and measuring could be used to discern differences in relation to any given phenomena. Is it possible to use the measurement of surplus in a baroque fashion to identify different possibilities for how to allocate surplus? This could be based, of course, on what other enterprises or communities do with the wealth they generate, or it could alert us to possibilities previously unknown.

A communist metric of surplus would constitute a different exercise of power since it would originate in a collective—a cooperative, a group, a municipality—and its aim would be to make us more effective in practicing an ethics and politics of

interdependence. Likewise, other ways of taking measure might allow us to value and care for common resources more effectively, allowing humans to make peace with the greater nonhuman world.

In closing, the possibility I am raising is that different systems of measuring and of valuing economies might give rise to both a different, more communal politics as well as to political subjects who are capable of conceiving their lives by a different measure. I am reminded here of Giorgio Agamben (2013), who in his book *The Highest Poverty* recounts the communism of religious monastic orders in Europe, pointing out that they also took back the economy of the monastery through devotional practices of accounting in a collective context. Every aspect of life was accounted for—what to wear, when to pray, when to eat, when to speak, when to be silent, and when to work. But in looking at Benedictine and Franciscan practice, from Agamben's perspective the point of this accounting is neither stricture nor prohibition but the cultivation of an awareness of common life. What Agamben sees is a coincidence of the law that governs behavior with the form of life that surrounds devotional practice and joy.

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