
Films and related materials for teaching *Take Back the Economy*

Created December 2014

Updated August 2015

Updated August 2020

This document identifies films and related materials for teaching *Take Back the Economy*. The materials have been recommended by members of the Community Economies Research Network (CERN). It includes comments from people who have used these materials, and Jenny Cameron's reflections on the materials she used when she taught *Take Back the Economy* to undergraduate students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in the first half of 2015. The full teaching materials from this course are available by [clicking here](#). Where appropriate, there are links to the course materials to show how the films etc. were incorporated into teaching.

To have any films etc. added, please email Jenny.Cameron@communityeconomies.org.

Introduction: Take Back the Economy: Why Now?

Wealth Inequality in America. YouTube piece about the astonishing differences in wealth in the US, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM>

Jenny's comment: I regularly use this in teaching simply because it is such a clear and shocking exposition of wealth inequality that is relevant not just to the US but to the planet as a whole. I find that it speaks to students (and speaks to why we need to take back the economy now).

When Capitalism Hits the Fan. Documentary featuring Economics Professor Richard Wolff (from University of Massachusetts) which discusses the current economic crisis, see <https://shop.mediaed.org/capitalism-hits-the-fan-p75.aspx>. (This link is to a very expensive version, but you can find other versions by searching online).

Janelle's comment: I have used this to introduce the big picture—the sort of depressing story of “the economy”. Next time I would spend less time on this.

If you are teaching anything about the 2008 Financial Crisis, Kate recommends two fictional films, *Margin Call* and *The Other Guys*, and two documentaries, *Inside Job* (“fantastic”) and *Too Big to Fail* (“very good”). She also has an article on films and popular cultural responses to the Crisis, see [Gender, Risk and the Wall Street Alpha Male](#). There's also the more recent *The Big Short*. And there's the acclaimed 2016 documentary, *Abacus: Small Enough to Jail*, about a small family-owned bank in New York City's Chinatown that served the Chinese American business community and was the only bank in the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis to be criminally prosecuted, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoERB7VZ818>.

Chapter 1. Reframing the Economy, Reframing Ourselves

[The Power of the Informal Economy](#). TED talk by Richard Neuwirth.

Jenny's comment: We had to stop the clip a few times as Neuwirth talks quickly and the students had trouble keeping up with him. The clip highlights the potential of much of the activity that takes place ‘below the waterline,’ albeit that much of this potential is currently being recognised by corporations

who are selling their products via informal markets in places like Africa. Used in [Lecture 1](#) (and I discuss it in my [reflections on Lecture 1](#)).

The Bamboo Bridge. Katherine Gibson is the Executive Producer of this 65-minute documentary (from 2019) which tells the story of a 1.5km bamboo bridge that was built each year across the Mekong River in Cambodia, linking a small island community to a nearby town. Once the monsoon started the bridge was dismantled and then recycled the following year. In 2017, this bridge was built for the last time when a massive new government-funded concrete bridge was built (as part of the country's embrace of China's Belt and Road initiative). Through a slow and gentle rhythm, the film engages with three generations of bridge builders who share stories of this unique sustainable infrastructure and the diverse community economies and ecologies it sustained. This film helps us reflect on the different economic activities and priorities that are intertwined in people's everyday lives. See <https://www.visionsdureel.ch/en/2020/media-film/the-bamboo-bridge>.

Who's Counting?: Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies and Global Economics (1995). Marilyn Waring takes the economy apart from a feminist perspective, see <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/whoo.html> (or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WS2nkr9q0VU>).

Jenny's Comment: It's an oldie but a goldie. There's a small section I often use in teaching to highlight the extent of women's unpaid household work, and how under-recognised it is (including in a village in Kenya). It's the ten-minute section from 17:34 to 27:30, and it includes an overview of Waring's transition from an elected conservative politician (who brought down the government of Aotearoa New Zealand by voting against nuclear-powered US submarines being allowed into the country's ports) to working with the United Nations.

The Story of Solutions. Building on the success of [The Story of Stuff](#), Annie Leonard has produced a solutions-focused video, see <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/the-story-of-solutions/>

Chapter 2. Take Back Work: Surviving Well

Happy (2011). Documentary, see <http://www.thehappymovie.com/film/>.

Living without Money. Documentary, see <http://vimeo.com/channels/528106/page:2>.

Jenny's comment: We used both of these documentaries in [Lectures 3 and 4](#). We watched the short video upload on the Happy website which features Mano J Singh, a rickshaw puller in Kolkata, India, who works 12 to 14 hours a day. Then we watched an extract of *Living without Money* (the segment from 20:42–25:50). The documentary is about Heidemarie Schwermer from Germany, who in 1997 (and in her 60s) basically gave away what she owned, except for what she could pack into one suitcase. Since then she has lived a life without money.

Janelle's comment on Happy: This is a film about, well, happiness. I'm not sure if the connections are made clear enough and there is certainly room for a critical reading of this film but it's good and I think very relevant.

Off the Map (2003). By Campbell Scott, See <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/off-the-map-2005>

Ted's comment: One of my favorite movies, a fictional piece that portrays a family living off the grid in

the American Southwest. Their “poverty” and self-provisioning lifestyle are celebrated not problematized. Film portrays motherhood as a dignified mix of diverse skills: hunting, gardening, car repair, cooking, and observation of the natural world. Beautifully made, unique film.

The Paradox of Choice. An RSA Animate by Professor Renata Salecl exploring the paralysing anxiety and dissatisfaction surrounding limitless choice. Certainly speaks to the idea of what it means to survive well. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bgMY82xzWo>

Smile or Die. An RSA Animate by Barbara Ehrenreich which also connect to what it means to survive well. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5um8QWWRvo&feature=relmfu%09>

Chapter 3. Take Back Business: Distributing Surplus

The Take. The classic 2004 documentary by Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein about the workers’ occupation of factories in Argentina in the early 2000s (87 minutes). See <https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/the-take-occupy-resist-produce/>.

Jenny’s comment: We watched the whole documentary in [Lecture 6](#), and the students responded extremely positively (I think because they could see parallels between what they had just experienced in the Umbrella Revolution with the occupation for 79 days of parts of Hong Kong and what the workers experienced at the hands of the police in Argentina). Sometimes I’ve just used the short section from 8:00 to 10:30. This shows Lewis and Klein protesting in 2001 against the WTO meeting in Seattle, and then being grilled by an interviewer about what the alternatives were. Here’s what they say in the voice-over:

Klein: There’s only so much protesting can accomplish. At a certain point you have to talk about what you are fighting for.

Lewis: So we decided to shut up for a while. Our opponents wanted alternatives; so did we. We heard rumours of a new kind of economy emerging in Argentina ... [and so they go to Argentina to listen and learn].

I’ve used this clip to illustrate different modes of political engagement. And I’m reminded of what Gibson-Graham and Dombroski (2020) write in the introduction to *The Handbook of Diverse Economies* about how the diverse economy framework is “a good tool for working *against* certain practices, although much scholarship has so far been dedicated to working *for* others (p. 18, original emphasis).

A Silent Transformation (2017). See <http://www.asilenttransformation.ca/>. This Canadian documentary explores the innovative self-help efforts of different communities across the Province of Ontario and the transformative power of the cooperative model. The film was made using a cooperative approach in which the filmmakers operated as a worker collective, used consensus-based decision making and took a collective approach to roles such as directing and editing. There are some useful short videos on the [Extras section of the Official Site](#).

Shift Change (2012). Documentary about worker-owned enterprises in North America and in Mondragon, Spain, see <http://shiftchange.org/video-clips/>. This documentary is also featured on the Shareable website in a section entitled [8 Inspiring Documentaries Exploring the Sharing Movement](#). Here you’ll find more short documentaries including a video of Cooperative Home Care Associates, the largest and oldest worker owned co-op in the United States.

Together (2012?). Documentary about the resilience of cooperatives to the crisis through testimonies of staff of four European cooperatives in France, Poland, Italy and Spain, see <http://www.together-thedocumentary.coop/>. It’s available in multiple languages.

Kate's comment: Very well made and works a treat.

Josh's comment: Useful.

Fixing the Future. Online series by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), includes two segments on worker-owned cooperatives in North America (including the Evergreen cooperative group in Cleveland, Ohio and Yo Mamas Catering Cooperative in Austin, Texas). See

<http://www.pbs.org/now/fixing-the-future/community.html>

Negotiating and Cooperating in Food Cooperatives (2015). See

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_DeDTKkCDk. This video is based on an interview Jenny Cameron did with Katherine Gibson. Jenny talks about the Women Workers' Cooperative at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and The Beanstalk Organic Food Cooperative in Newcastle Australia. It includes discussion of how these cooperatives negotiated the process of producing surplus and what do to with the surplus generated.

Period. End of Sentence (2018). See <https://vimeo.com/301410537>. It's available on NetFlix, see

<https://www.netflix.com/nz/title/81074663>. This is 26-minute documentary filmed in India about a group of women who start making menstrual pads for themselves but soon develop a small business. It won an Oscar for best short documentary. The [discussion of the film](#) by Nayantara Roy is worth reading, as is the [NPR piece](#) by Nurith Aizenman.

YouTube clips about two social enterprises in Cambodia:

Sustainable Green Fuel Enterprise (SGFE) which produces environmentally-friendly char-briquettes, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVBPvYOGAGI> (It shows how a business can address social inclusion, environmental repair and be viable).

The fuel efficient stoves developed by GERES, see

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mv8GwurHsgw>

It is also worth looking at www.communitypartnering.info for material on building social enterprises in the Philippines. This was part of an action research project led by Katherine Gibson.

Chapter 4. Take Back the Market: Encountering Others

Food for Change (2012?). This is a film about food-based consumer cooperatives in the US (and their role in war on poverty in the 1960s and 1970s). See <http://foodforchange.coop/>.

Janelle's comment: This is an excellent full-length film. It's difficult to get but great for seeing the impact and history of food co-ops in the US. The one problem is they don't talk about associations of food co-ops, such as the Neighboring Food Co-op Association.

Ted's comment: Fantastic new documentary on the American Food Co-ops movement—well-researched and packed with vintage imagery and stories of early food co-ops (starting post WWII) and on up into the present.

A Brooklyn Story: The Park Slope Food Co-op (2013). A YouTube documentary about this amazing consumer cooperative in Brooklyn, New York (which has over 16,000 members and is open 365 days a year). See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rayQP2W3wg>.

Jenny's comment: I haven't had a chance to use this in class, but this cooperative has been such an inspiration. For example, it helped give our food cooperative in Newcastle confidence to introduce a

work requirement for all members, see *Negotiating and Cooperating in Food Cooperatives*, above.

Pachamama Coffee Cooperative. Pachamama is a cooperative of cooperatives and it uses a direct-trade model to shorten the distance between producers and consumers. On their website (<https://pachamamacoffee.com/pages/about>) there is lots of useful material including the [transcript of an interview](#) with several of the Board of Directors. It's also worth watching the very [short interview with Raúl del Aguila](#) the founding president of Pachamama, who died in 2013. He was also manager of [COCLA](#) in Peru, which is a cooperative of tens of thousands of small-scale organic coffee producers in Peru, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico and Ethiopia.

Jenny's comment: I use this quite a bit in teaching; it's great as it's very short and really speaks to the scale issue (by demonstrating what can happen with small-scale producers link-up).

Hour Exchange Portland. There's a video about this initiative on the PBS website *Fixing the Future*. See <http://www.pbs.org/now/fixing-the-future/community.html> (it's the last example, entitled Time Banking).

Jenny's comment: I used this in [Week 8](#) and it seemed to work a treat. I'm not sure why—maybe because it was a completely new idea for the students.

The Gleaners and I (2000). See <https://www.criterion.com/films/30368-the-gleaners-and-i>.

Jenny's comment: It's a wonderful film, and as the title says, the theme of gleaning runs through the film. Though I have found that some students struggle with it—perhaps the first 4 minutes would be enough. But I always remember the material on the impressive man who lives in a shelter; gleans the food left-over from one of the Paris street markets; and gifts his teaching reading and writing to other people in the shelter, mainly immigrants from Senegal and Mali (from around 1:10:00).

Chapter 5. Take Back Property: Commoning

This land is our Land. Film by David Bollier on the commons. See <http://bollier.org/land-our-land-fight-reclaim-commons>. There's also a trailer at <https://vimeo.com/16743767>. Note: this film used to be called *Silent Theft*.

What are Commons? Succinct YouTube clip on the commons that mentions resources, education, IP and health. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOZWFPVBTws>.

Jenny's comment: I haven't used it but it would fit with a discussion of the tragedy of the (unmanaged) commons (which of course means that if it's unmanaged it's not a commons!). See our discussion of this on pages 130 to 131 of TBTE.

New Forms of 'Commoning' in a Post-Quake City (2015). Katherine Gibson interviews Kelly Dombroski about [processes of commoning](#) in the context of the post-earthquake recovery in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Hope Frustrated: Climate Change Adaptation in Lalua, Bangladesh (2020).

Patuakhali Water Museum Bangladesh: A Case Study of Community-led Action (2020).

Water Resources in Bhutan—Challenges and Hopes (2019).

These three videos are produced by Kelly Dombroski and explore the role of water in the lives of people in Bangladesh and Bhutan. They would be useful to use to talk about what happens when a commons such as water is under threat and what options there are for communities in response. These are all on

Kelly's YouTube Channel, see

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJEJk_h45NCb_GWjf81Zv5eLJ3QNXFokb.

Homes and Hands: Community Land Trusts in Action. A 40-minute US video that includes three case studies. See <https://www.newday.com/film/homes-hands-community-land-trusts-action>.

Louise's comment: The stories are great, even though the focus at the introduction is on affordability. Once they get into the case studies, it's excellent and addresses the core issues of community and inter-generational equity. The studies are from 1996 (with a 2006 update).

The Community Land Trust Model and Movement. See <https://groundedsolutions.org/tools-for-success/resource-library/community-land-trust-model-and-movement>. This video discusses how the land trust model was pioneered by black farmers in the South and spread across the US.

What is a Community Land Trust? A 5-minute promotional video from the UK. See

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2RLE1nUy9U>

Louise's comment: Very cute.

Dark Days (2000). Documentary by Marc Singer that shows how homeless people in New York have turned an abandoned subway tunnel into an autonomous community. If you can't get hold of it, the first 10 minutes are on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dh4s78Db5OQ> *Ted's Comment*: Life in this dark underground site is not romanticized—but so many of these folks show incredible resilience and ingenuity and camaraderie.

Chapter 6. Take Back Finance: Investing in Futures

The Banker Ladies (2020) by Caroline Shenaz Hossein is about three 'banker ladies' in Canada and it provides insights into the crucial role that savings groups and credit associations can play in the lives of women as they provide for their families and themselves. See also

<https://www.communityeconomies.org/news/banker-ladies>.

Doing Finance Differently (2020) by Kelly Dombroski is about savings groups and credit associations in Indonesia, including those that are used by women as well as those that operate on a village basis.

Abacus: Small Enough to Jail (2016). As above, this documentary is about a small family-owned bank in New York City's Chinatown that served the Chinese American business community and was the only bank in the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis to be criminally prosecuted. It has some great insights into how a bank can serve its community, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoERB7VZ818>.

It's a Wonderful Life (1947). Classic film by Frank Capra.

Ted's comment: The Bailey Building and Loan is the opposite of every large bank today. Each account holder is portrayed as having a crucial role in community investment. Old corny movie, yes—but also still radical.

General

Snowpiercer (2012). Futuristic film starring the likes of Tilda Swinton, see

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1706620/>.

Boone's comment: I haven't used it but it is super-provocative and I think it can be used in a number of ways to show/discuss how ideology and desire attach us to particular ontologies.

Be Kind, Rewind (2008). Comedy starring the likes of Jack Black, see

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0799934/>

Kelly's comment: I watched this film a few years ago in which a couple of guys re-film an entire video store with no budget after they accidentally wipe all the videos. It becomes a community economy of sorts where Hollywood films are re-made to speak to local issues and become a community rallying point where production and consumption are entirely local. And it's funny. I have always thought it would be a good one to use in teaching diverse or community economies but haven't quite managed to fit it in.

Winstanley (1975)

Where the Green Ants Dream (1984)

The Gleaners and I (2000) (also mentioned above in relation to encountering others)

Patrick's comment: They are feature length films and thus more for reflection. I found them helpful in trying to illustrate and think about the conflict between fundamentally different social relations and relations to nature and the difficulties of trying to negotiate such differences through, for example, Western legal processes that assumes a particular epistemological framework.