

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF POSSIBILITY: FINDING AND FORGING 'THE  
OTHERWISE' IN TWO WINNIPEG-BASED ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITIES

by

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## **Abstract**

Theoretically driven by the work of J.-K. Gibson-Graham and postcapitalist politics, the thesis draws on ethnographic research in two community organizations to explore what is possible to think and imagine in the making and everyday of two community economies. The first half of the thesis examines possibly / knowledge, or the use and impact of ideas about economy and related concepts such as rent, enterprise and social enterprise, to study how theoretical practices shape community endeavors. Chapters examine the practice of capitalocentric and “otherwise” economic ideas. The second half of the thesis examines possibility / becoming, or the moment of becoming and the processes leading up to such becoming, to study, in one case, the social relations of a group and the role of consensus-based decision making and the impact of fantasies about cooperatives and cooperation; and in the other case, the impact of ideas about the role and roll-out of policy within the training program and who shapes an organization’s ability to intervene in the local labour market.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Tyler Rebecca Pearce. The research that forms the basis of the thesis was reviewed and approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, Certificate H09-02604, initial approval 2 November 2009, under the title “An ethnography of possibility”.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This is the thesis I wrote while doing other (community and economic geographical!) things. This includes eventually working full-time at one of the non-profit organizations that served as one of the two ethnographic field sites that the chapters are based and becoming the chair of the board at the other. The thesis consists of chapters focused on what were often “small moments” in the making or sustaining these two community organizations<sup>1</sup>, both involved, albeit in different ways, in aiming to change or take charge of their economic geographies.

Theoretically driven by the work of J.-K. Gibson-Graham and the growing body of scholarship that has become known as postcapitalist politics or community economies, the thesis is broadly about the very practical activities of building or sustaining community economies. The work and research I did during this period was both exciting as well as mundane; difficult as well as thought-provoking. After two years of observing, participating, meeting and working with people who want another world (and think it’s possible), this thesis is the result. But it is less an account of those two years than an examination of everyday ways of struggling to re-think economy. Perhaps it is best described as an ethnography of the journeys of “possibility”: an examination of what is possible to think about otherwise economies in my small corner of the world (Winnipeg, Manitoba) and an examination of some of the “holdbacks” on such thinking. My approach has been to write about events that at the start I didn’t know how to think about.

This introduction will serve as a primer for the chapters that follow. I start with a brief intellectual background to the emergence of Gibson-Graham’s project before turning to a more specific discussion of the relevant key ideas and interventions of

Gibson-Graham's work that inform this thesis. This is followed by a description of the dissertation's approach and methods.

### **Rethinking Marx and politics in a time of capitalist triumphalism**

Gibson-Graham's work is shaped by a broad intellectual project of rethinking Marxism and as a creative "cross pollination" of Marxism with feminist, queer and post poststructuralist theory. The cross-pollination of post-Marxism and queer feminist poststructural theory is evident in the first couple of pages of *The End of Capitalism's* original preface. There, Gibson-Graham tell a story about an academic conference. It is a tale of listening to what is not represented in a set of papers about household change and deindustrialization (see 1996, xxxvii-xli). This is spliced with notations of questions feminist theorists had grappled with and that had resulted in a bevy of feminist and queer theories. For example:

"Why...have embracing and holistic expressions for social structure like patriarchy fallen into relative disuse among feminist theorists...while similar conceptions of capitalism as a system or 'structure of power are still prevalent and resilient?" (2)

Although they creatively used feminist and queer theory to address scholars within their field of economic geography, Gibson-Graham's work was also influenced by and had an influence on what is known as Post-Marxism<sup>2</sup>. Gibson-Graham's 1996 text draws theoretical sustenance from "anti-essentialist" Marxist texts. Yet within the same texts from which they draw inspiration for their own work, they likewise find pregnant absences: most pertinently, the exclusive focus on capitalism over other economic forms. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe's (1987) anti-essentialist Marxism is both source of hope (theoretical renewal) and fertile ground for Gibson-Graham's critique. They note,

for instance, that Laclau and Mouffe use “‘commodification’ almost exclusively as a metonym for capitalist expansion” (6), erasing how the production of commodities are not exclusive to capitalist production processes. In another example, Gibson-Graham note that Althusser’s work did not discuss noncapitalist economic processes, even though his philosophical (re)reading of Marx (1968/2009) gave (post)Marxism the non-transhistorical concept of overdetermination, in which modes of production have relatively autonomous time and history (111). Gibson-Graham’s work, and their 1996 text in particular, is thus written in the miasmic soup of (“orthodox”) Marxism / Post-Marxism, even as the task of their text begins to trace the outline of its outside. Their intervention cuts across the theoretical work cited here as much as it does related fields, including the work of economic geographers.

Gibson-Graham are a part of what might be considered a second wave of Post-Marxist scholarship, especially as developed by U.S.-based academics working after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which was a time of capitalist triumphalism. If foundational Marxist assumptions (essentialism, trans-historicism) had been surmountable (as represented by the work of Althusser, and Laclau and Mouffe), these theoretical developments did not themselves supply a new or even modified notion of politics and the political, specifically as politics and the political related to the economy. Callari notes that “the theoretical framework of classical orthodox Marxism was an economistic framework” (1991, 202), where “its theory of ‘the economy’ [was] a given mechanism...exhibiting certain essentially inevitable patterns” (203) and where actors within the economy were ascribed “intrinsic ‘interests’ which corresponded to their economic ‘positions’” (203). Classical Marxism, Callari writes, “economized the

political”. This was such a fossilized conception of politics that even early post-Marxists, such as Laclau and Mouffe, thought the only way for a renewed concept of the political was to abandon the concept of class in favour of other social categories like race and gender (Callari, 204; Laclau and Mouffe 1987). Marxists influenced by poststructuralism in the United States, led by Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff (1987), sought instead to rethink class, reminding readers of Marx’s original formation in which class was conceived as a process. Gibson-Graham along with Resnick and Wolff released an edited volume on the topic in 2000, *Class and Its Others*, and another in 2001 *RE/Presenting Class: Essays in Postmodern Marxism*. Where classical Marxism “economized the political” (Callari, 1991), the above (now-termed) Post-Marxist work sought to politicize the economy (Callari 1991, 205). My review of Gibson-Graham’s work, below, although written to situate this thesis and Gibson-Graham’s work within it, will also play the role of some of the key postulates that Post-Marxists share.

### **J.-K. Gibson-Graham and postcapitalism**

This thesis is not interested so much in the histories of Marxism / Post-Marxism or the exciting theoretical flourishing made possible by thinking with poststructuralism, feminist theory or queer theory – incredibly interesting topics as they may be. But broad overview of Gibson-Graham’s arguments is key to situating the interest and approach of this thesis. For Gibson-Graham, how the economy is conceptualized matters, and how we think about economy changes what is possible<sup>3</sup>. Their first book, *The End of Capitalism (As We Know It)*, questioned how researchers, academics, activists and others know “the economy” (1996 / 2006<sup>4</sup>). Their analysis suggested, in part, that how Marxist and anti-

capitalist academics and activists represented the economy mirrored mainstream representations insofar as such analyses tended to see capitalism everywhere, and describe it as homogenous and all-powerful. They coined the term “capitalocentric” to describe such a representation of capitalism.

Originally written in the hey-day of capitalist triumphalism, in the introduction to the new edition of *The End of Capitalism* (republished in 2006), they described 1996 as “the height of the academic obsession with capitalist globalization” (1996, viii). Their issue with such an obsession was not that academics and activists were concerned with local and global economic inequality, exploitation and the other (familiar) ravages of (global) capitalism. They were concerned about the ways academics and activists talked about “capitalism” as all-encompassing and utterly inescapable. They were likewise concerned about the ways that “noncapitalist” activities and other economic alternatives were absent, described or evaluated in radical analyses. Their text took issue with both the empirics of seeing capitalism everywhere and with the ethics that such a (mis)representation entailed. Politically, they argued, all-encompassing statements about the truth of inescapable capitalism worked to “block transformative ambitions” (ix). Their aim in *The End of Capitalism* was to “attempt to transform familiar theoretical certainties about capitalism – its powers and extent, its nature and effects – into empirical questions susceptible to answers both various and changing” (1996, xxxii). And their “goal was to foster the expansion of our politicized and practical knowledge of capitalism, as well as of existing noncapitalist economic organizations and practices” (1996, xxxii-xxxiii). Theirs was an ambitious discursive endeavour to smash capitalism.

Taking the above as a starting point, Gibson-Graham and others are interested in “expand[ing] our capacity to act” within the on-going creation of economy (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Cameron 2013, xviii). This means imagining a full range of actions and activities, including different forms of labour, in which people can engage beyond anti-capitalist protests or armchair critiques of capitalism. Gibson-Graham argue that there are practical and already-existing ways that challenge the idea of all-powerful capitalism, which may be examined as sources of inspiration or further developed. Focusing on economic possibility for Gibson-Graham meant politics: a (re)politicization of economy. Their work calls attention to economic possibility, or in more colloquial terms, call to “take back the economy”. My research project is one response to their call.

How to enliven a politics of economic possibility is developed in Gibson-Graham’s second volume, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (2006). The volume is part “how-to” book, part political treatise. Gibson-Graham do not find it necessary to stipulate in advance correct or even sure-fire ways of making or enlivening community economies. This is an important aspect of the politics they explore and aim to engender with their 2006 text. Their approach and philosophy of political transformation is inspired by feminism, which they note has transformed gender relations and women’s status worldwide without relying on centralized women’s organizations. They write:

“we continue to be inspired by feminism as a global force, one that started small and personal and largely stayed that way, that worked on cultivating new ways of being, that created new languages, discourses, and representations, that built organizations, and that quickly (albeit un-evenly) encompassed the globe.”  
(Gibson-Graham 2002, 53)

Geographically, their politics do not privilege one scale over another as the ideal site of political action; nor do their politics imbue particular sites (e.g. the neighbourhood, the



community) with positive ethical meaning, as is often the case in community economic development literature's valuation of "the local", for instance.<sup>5</sup>

Postcapitalist politics is a "politics of possibility". Throughout their 2006 text Gibson-Graham offer examples of economic experimentation, and present techniques for thinking and enacting postcapitalist politics as well as building community economies. They draw on examples from existing community economies and from their own action-research-based projects to expand and ruminate on what such a politics might entail. Reflecting on their ten-year adventure in charting out a postcapitalist politics, they write: "The salutary and grounded message of [this text] is that we must be ready with strategies for confronting what forcefully pushes back against the discursive imaginings and practical enactments we associate with building a different economy" (2006, xxii). Throughout the text, they work toward developing some of these strategies, a few of which I discuss below.

When Gibson-Graham examine organizations and experiments in their 2006 text, they seek to examine what they call "the lineament of the emerging political imaginary" (xxvi), which they describe as "a political and ethical practice of theory, and an everyday practice of freedom" (xxvi). Here and throughout they emphasize that any politics of possibility is constituted by theoretical choices (xxvii). Theirs is not an Idealist argument, but one that suggests our "thinking" has a materiality to it (xxviii).<sup>6</sup> The emphasis in their second volume concerns what they call "the ontology of a politics of possibility" (xxvii). Thinking plays a large role in such a politics. Indeed, their focus throughout this "how-to book" is attention to what they call "*doing thinking*" (xxix). The phrase "doing thinking" implodes the pervasive dualism where action (doing) and theory (thinking) are

understood as different activities: Gibson-Graham use it as a way of calling attention to the ethical choices available in thinking, framing “thinking” as a specific kind of action. “Doing thinking” is a development from their previous text insofar as their 2006 text embraces an “emotional orientation” (xxix) in their thinking (i.e. an embodied rather than purely analytical rejection of dualism like action / theory). Reflecting on their 1996 text and the 2006 volume, they write:

“Where once we believed that the economy was depoliticized largely through its representations, we have more recently come to understand that its repoliticization requires cultivating ourselves as subjects who can imagine and enact a new economic politics.” (xxvii)

This statement pushes Gibson-Graham’s project beyond a concern with how capitalism is represented or how examples of noncapitalism are evaluated. Here, Gibson-Graham shift their concern from one dominated by an interest in representation and a “call to action” to examining just what might bring that call to action into being. The result is an expansive understanding of what it means to politicize something: beyond just “knowing” (an issue), politicization requires subjects who “do” economy differently. They seek to explain this expansive understanding of repoliticizing economy: where doing thinking is inclusive of cultivating the self, for instance. In this way their second volume seeks to chart not just a call for a repoliticized economy, but a postcapitalist politics. They suggest that their text can be read as a charting of such a politics, and understood as three intertwined “moments”: a politics of language, a politics of the subject, and a politics of collective action. I will talk about each in turn, using the opportunity to discuss some of the main techniques Gibson-Graham employ to respond to the challenges of each.

### *A politics of language*

By a politics of language, Gibson-Graham continue to develop their contention that the *available* ways we have to talk about, to represent and to understand economic relationships and processes profoundly shapes what we see as possible in our present. Gibson-Graham suggest that mainstream and even alternative economic theories describe capitalism as the “only game in town” – described above as capitalocentrism<sup>7</sup>. Erased from view, Gibson-Graham contend, is economic difference, which is that mixture of capitalist as well as all the non-capitalist, non-market, gift-giving practices that go into provisioning our daily survival. This is where their (perhaps most well-known) reading technique comes in, a technique they describe as “reading for difference rather than dominance”. Here, the reader aims to map the diverse economy; that is, the capitalist, alternative-capitalist or non-capitalist activities within a given community, organization or circumstance. Often, reading for difference means rereading familiar economic landscapes. Its purpose is to inventory the transactions, relationships and forms that make wealth and economy. Techniques of rereading can be used to see non-capitalist activities in which we already engage (some of which sustain us daily) and others which can be expanded into community economy activities. Rereading orients us towards curiosity about how a claim of truth is enacted, and alerts us to the contingencies, accidents, whitewashed or black-boxed details that change the story of economy from one of unfettered Truth, to a particular and place-able narrative.

#### *A politics of the subject*

For Gibson-Graham, challenging the representational politics of capitalism as the only game in town is not enough to sustain – let alone imagine or bring into being – other

kinds of economic projects and livelihoods. Knowing how to name alternative capitalist and non-capitalist activities does not mean much, they claim, if participants using such a language “cannot readily identify with the alternative subject positions it avails” (1996, xvii). The succinct example they use from their community projects is entrenched participants “getting up wanting a job – and if not wanting one, feeling they need one – rather than an alternative economy” (1996, xvii). This is why they explicitly call for a politics of the subject. The politics of the subject focuses attention on ontological matters; that is, on being and becoming. Gibson-Graham suggest our economic identities – even those not recognized as “identities” – influence our desires and dreams for other economies. Their community economies projects focus as much on new modes of representing (seeing economies as diverse) as on practices of the self. Describing these foci in broad strokes, they write:

“What practices of thinking and feeling, what dispositions and attitudes, what capacities can we cultivate to displace the familiar mode of being of the anticapitalist subject, with its negative and stymied positioning? How do we become not merely opponents of capitalism, but subjects who can desire and create ‘non-capitalism’?” (1996, xvii)

Drawing force from the feminist adage “the personal is political”, they suggest a range of strategies for cultivating ourselves as alternative economic subjects. Self-cultivation, for example, can be aimed at generating a stance “that orients us, in a spirit of hopefulness, toward connections and openings” (1). Such a strategy is political because it encourages an ethical sensibility that sees “economy” as within one’s sphere of influence. This, then, is not an individualist “self-improvement” project, but one aimed at uncovering and fostering relations of ethical interdependence.

Gibson-Graham do not put themselves outside the project of rethinking economy and making postcapitalist worlds. Indeed, they note that their project has involved “cultivating ourselves as thinkers of political and economic possibility” (1). They admit this stance is (sometimes) anything but easy. But neither is it hopeless. The result is that their work expresses both a hopeful and thoughtful vulnerability about knowing the economy and changing the world. This stance has been instructive in my research, as I hope the chapters will attest.

### *A politics of collective action*

Lastly, a politics of collective action “involves conscious and combined efforts to build a new kind of economic reality” (xxxvi). Gibson-Graham do not believe that there is one scale or size of group or institutional form that makes an ideal collaborative action. Instead, they insist that what is important is the forging of relations in the “here and now”. Their 2006 text includes examples of groups big and small: from international cooperatives to small neighbourhood-based projects. Gibson-Graham hold that all such projects can be valued for the ways they work toward building on “economic interdependence, and adopting an ethic of care of the other” (xxxvii).

It is within such a politics that they discuss their fledging notion of “community economies”. As described by Roelvink and Gibson-Graham, their community economy approach is inaugurated by defining the community economy as a “praxis of co-existence and interdependence” rather than an economic form (2009, 147). The emphasis here is on the social relations that make economy, rather than a vision of the economy as in any way prior, separate or removed from interactions among human and non-human others (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham, 2009). As will be seen shortly, the two organizations /

groups that were the two field sites upon which this ethnography is based are also the result of prior collaboration. Both exist as outcomes of ideas about radical and more humanistic (or liberal) visions of community economic development respectively. Both have their local, national and global lineaments. In this thesis, I bring the work of postcapitalist scholars and Gibson-Graham's work specifically to bear on the activities witnessed at each site.

Thinking and creative thinking in particular hold a special place in postcapitalist thought as charted by Gibson-Graham. In my reading, thinking links the three component politics they describe:

“Our practices of thinking widen the scope of possibility by opening up each observed relationship to examination for its contingencies and each theoretical analysis for its inherent vulnerability and act of commitment” (2006, xxxiii).

Thinking, for Gibson-Graham, includes and emulates creativity, which they describe as a wellspring of both ideas and hope. Creativity “proliferates possibility” (2006, xxxii). Creativity is an activity of creating the unexpected (2006, xxxii). Practices of creativity can involve cross-fertilizing theoretical insights from one domain to another. For example, in Gibson-Graham's 1996 text, *The End of Capitalism (As We Know It)*, they draw on insights from the experience of feminism and queer theory to produce a vision of economy that question the predominance of capitalism in so-called “capitalist societies”. Creativity is an activity whose products may be wonder (new ways of thinking), excitement and curiosity (ways of being), or lead to economic innovation (new ways of engaging in economic experiments). Creative acts provide resources for postcapitalist experiments.

The place of theory is important in both of Gibson-Graham's texts: "Theory ... has an independent and even an adventurous role to play" (1996, xx). By this they mean that theory does not have to be limited to a reading and use as designed by its original author. Pointing to their use of Marxist class categories as an example, they note they use these specific Marxian categories in their work not in the sense that the categories "reflect a transhistorical mode of social organization" but instead "'inaugurate the conceptual space' for a distinctive political project, one that is interested (in both senses of the word) in the economics and ethics of surplus appropriation and distribution" (1996, xx, citing Özselçuk 2005). In such a way, they employ theory (and its accompanying concepts and categories) "as emerging from the concerns of the theorist, rather than as authorized by the objects of theory, including particular times and places" (1996, xx).

For Gibson-Graham, theory is a tool used to think with or, as above, "inaugurate" creative thinking. Insisting on a more dynamic relationship between theory and practice, and thinking and action, they situate thinking as

- An ethics (2006, xxvii-xxx), key for deliberating on "what to do" and "how to act". (2006, xxix)
- A practice, shaping what we know, how we know and how we engage or incorporate such knowledge.

In such a way, "thinking" in Gibson-Graham's sense is a "kind of action": "touching the world and being touched by it and in the process things (and we) are changing" (2006, xxix). Much of my focus in this thesis aims to track what Gibson-Graham describe as the "doing of thinking" (2006, xxix); most chapters, in differing ways, seek to examine and analyze how the people at each organization (and sometimes in the larger CED / alternative communities) are "thinking". When I use this nomenclature, I'm not suggesting I can read minds. Instead, I'm pointing to how those around me are

“constructing / performing” or working with particular conceptions, categories or (often unspoken) ideas.

In a very clear sense, this thesis is fundamentally an engagement with Gibson-Graham’s work. Their work inspired and prompted this research and its methods. Unlike so many writers and activists I encountered who critiqued capitalism (critiques I share), Gibson-Graham’s work made me ponder how I might “take back the economy”<sup>8</sup>. They forced me to examine the ways that I, and the various community groups, activist or community development circles I had been involved in, were held back or transfixed by our visions of “the economy” and how to “fix it”.

I should be clear that my aim in the research this thesis represents was not to test Gibson-Graham’s theories. For some, their work is controversial and empirically suspect, for others it is divisive. I review some of the most common critiques of their work in the concluding chapter, critiques that I view largely as misreadings of their political project, but nonetheless contain serious questions that ought to be addressed if postcapitalist work is to develop along side and in conversation with the larger field of economic geography. Many of the critiques that exist could reasonably apply to this work, such as ignoring the role of the state in creating or destroying community economies (Kelly 2005) or the idea that “structure” is wholly absent or underappreciated in Gibson-Graham and other Post-Marxist’s work (Glassman 2003). Instead of attempting to address these critiques in the work of the thesis, I take the tact of drawing on Gibson-Graham’s analysis and employ some of the strategies outlined above to examine how ideas about “economy” become impactful: narrowing or expanding what is possible to do in the specific contexts of the two organizations. It is an admittedly limited approach from the get-go, but I as hope the



thesis illustrates, one worthy of other insights. I draw on Gibson-Graham's strategies in at least two ways. First I draw on their work to undertake the analysis and interpretation of the research material. Second, while undertaking the research, I used many of their strategies in my approach to participating in the two field sites. I'll discuss this next.

### **Research: settings**

This research project took place within an already existing network of "alternative" and / or "community economic development" projects. As Amin, Cameron and Hudson (2003) note, "alternative" economic activities, specifically those recognized by policy makers as part of the social economy, encompass diverse organizational forms. They cite "co-operatives, charities, companies limited by guarantee, credit unions, Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS), voluntary organizations, tenants and residents groups, community associations, faith-based organizations, ethnic minority groups and all manner of informal social groupings" (34). In undertaking this research I entered a broad field of alternative economies / community economic development projects in Winnipeg – a field that included academic and community researchers; workers from worker cooperatives and collectives; educators and activists who put on workshops and conferences; and a host of others, such as activists, volunteers, artists, writers. Through informational interviews, I learned about the kinds of alternatives and openings that organizations and workers within the sector were making and / or taking advantage of, and their reflections on the field. I learned about the Winnipeg sector, networks and its prospects<sup>9</sup>.

But it was only at the two sites that became the basis of the thesis' chapters where I was able to consider the work of creating community economies and the "ground of the possible"<sup>10</sup>. Both organizations were fecund sites in which to examine questions related

to economic possibilities and otherwise (economic) thinking and action. Indeed, the two field sites became the basis of the thesis, where I spent over two years observing and participating.

### *Field site 1*

The first organization, the Emma Goldman Permanent Autonomous Zone Cooperative (or “E-PAZ” for short)<sup>11</sup>, was a fledgling cooperative formed by a group of alternative businesses (primarily worker cooperatives) and radical political and social organizations. It formed with the express purpose to purchase and manage the commercial building they already tenanted in Winnipeg’s gentrifying downtown. As an (informal) institution, the E-PAZ, and many of its groups, had been in existence since the mid-1990s. And, although most groups contributed in one way or another to operating the building over that period, the mortgage and management was held by one of its founders. That person had moved on to other projects and wanted to extricate themselves from the mortgage and ownership responsibilities that came with a commercial building. The research covers the period from just after the tenants at the E-PAZ began discussing incorporating as a cooperative and ends just as they secured financing to purchase the E-PAZ building.

I first approached the E-PAZ in the fall of 2009, during what was their third “E-PAZ community” meeting to discuss the formation of a cooperative. I asked if I could join them in their efforts as a participatory researcher interested in building and sustaining alternative economies. Although some of the groups were hesitant about having a researcher present, a few of my personal friends involved in the E-PAZ community vouched for me as someone who was returning to the city and promised that I was not a

“parachute-in academic” interested in codifying their knowledge solely for personal gain. This, along with the fact that I had been involved in and familiar with the E-PAZ community in the late 1990s before moving to another city was enough for those gathered to consent to me using the E-PAZ and their project as a site for research. As part of my participation, I briefly joined one of the unincorporated collectives that operated a small lending library in the building<sup>12</sup>. I participated in a spate of committees formed to study and propose how the E-PAZ could be reorganized as a cooperative and to raise money for a down payment on their building. As part of my participatory role, I organized an office for the Co-op and helped organize a major fundraiser. I also worked on the various documents and systems the new Cooperative needed in order to buy their building (business plans, various grants, listserv and file-sharing systems and so on). The second chapter of the thesis, *Thinking Rent Otherwise*, details the early formation of the E-PAZ Cooperative and their attempts to (re)define their community. Chapter 4, *Becoming Cooperative*, likewise focuses on the E-PAZ Co-op as individuals and members struggled to embody their ethical and political affiliations in this new formation.

### *Field site 2*

The second field site, Catalyst Retrofits Inc., was a growing non-profit social enterprise and government-funded training program focused on energy- and water-retrofits in lower income dwellings. It taught on-the-job entry-level skills in carpentry to under- and unemployed people from Winnipeg’s inner city, most of whom were Aboriginal or newcomers. I first entered their cramped office, located in an economically poor and racialized area of the city in late 2009<sup>13</sup>. After two interviews with the executive

director, I asked him for permission to use Catalyst as a second site for this research. He agreed.

I took on a more traditional researcher role at Catalyst, meaning that I did not engage in debate or decision-making, and instead observed Catalyst's everyday operations. After "hanging around" the office and following their executive director for about five months, I was hired by the organization, first to do a couple of small research and writing contracts. Later, I was hired as a full-time employee, starting with a four-month temporary position to cover the duties of a staff member on sick leave. I ended up becoming permanent staff, first as a project manager for a large renovation project, and later as their director of operations, a position I moved into in February 2012. I worked at Catalyst until November 2013.

My changing involvement in the organization can be tracked across the two chapters that focus on Catalyst. Chapter 3, *Performing Social Enterprise*, is based on material collected solely as a researcher. Much of the material from Chapter 5, *Encountering Workfare*, came from the period when I was transitioning from being a researcher at Catalyst to doing some contract work for them<sup>14</sup>. The result was that I was around the Catalyst office more, often with different hats on.

Given my changing role and differing levels of involvement, "professional" investment and power at each organization, all chapters include a statement of my position at the time the research was generated and the chapter written.

It is often noted that ethnography is built on fieldwork but how the field is constituted – how we configure "the field" and how we go about the production of academic text – is not straightforward, nor politically or ethically easy to navigate (Katz

1994, 44). Much of what I've said about each of the sites touch on methodological and research issues. I turn now to discuss these at length. I'll begin by discussing the methodological approaches that I drew on to carry out the project.

## **Methodological practices**

### *Ethnography*

This work is based primarily on ethnographic observation. While participant observation is often cited as the main method of ethnography (Herbert 2000), I differentiate between the types of ethnographic observation used in this study as a way of telling the very different research experiences at each field site<sup>15</sup>. I do so using the terms ethnographic observation (employed at Catalyst) and participant-observation (employed at the E-PAZ). Each has benefits as well as drawbacks.

I use the term “ethnographic observation” to refer to non-participant observation (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994), a research positionality that I called a “more traditional researcher” above. Ethnographic observation involved hanging out in Catalyst's offices and tagging along to meetings, often writing out long transcripts of what was happening or being said. By saying I was a “more traditional researcher”, I mean that Catalyst's permanent staff and most visitors knew who I was (“a researcher”) and what I was doing (“observing the everyday of Catalyst”), and even much of the finer details (i.e. what my study was about)<sup>16</sup>. Participant-observation, which I employed at the E-PAZ Co-op, in stark contrast, included becoming involved and personally invested in the events, decisions and processes related to the building of the Cooperative. Some would call what I describe as participant-observation as action-research. I prefer the term

participant-observation because I think it focuses more clearly on the activities of my involvement – as a participant and a researcher<sup>17</sup>.

Both types of observation I employed approach ethnography as a descriptive and interpretive endeavor (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010, 126; Atkinson and Hammersley 1994). Here we can move from an understanding of ethnography as some kind of straightforward methodology to one which understands ethnography as a “craft” (Katz 2002, 79), or as Latour describes it, “a descriptive device” (2010). Both Katz and Latour, if in differing ways, call attention to the writerly aspects of the ethnographic text; in other words, that the text is put together, often using what Katz likes to call “luminous description” (Katz 2001, 2002)<sup>18</sup>. Ethnography is meant to be creative, imaginative, and “can only be judged *ex post*, after someone has brought them into being” (Geertz 1988, 147). Ethnography “enable[s] conversation” or aims to “enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people”, across difference and outlook (147). And it is this, and its inescapable use of subjectivity that makes ethnography “an art” rather than a science (Geertz 1988). I share Geertz’s view, and approached the task of the thesis as such. For this reason, I include here a somewhat elongated discussion of textuality in a section that is supposed to be devoted to methodology. In my view, textuality is not outside methodology.

The thesis aims to describe the character and context of both sites (descriptive), and analyses the research materials I gathered / made at each site using theoretical tools and strategies (interpretive)<sup>19</sup>. I use Gibson-Graham’s theories and lens to study ideas, for example, about “the economy” and related capitalocentric ideas or claims. By calling this an “ethnography of possibility”, this thesis is more akin to an ethnography of ideas rather

than concerned with a group or culture. Ethnographies of ideas, rather than cultures or a people, are not new. An excellent example of an idea ethnography is Anna Tsing's *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* where she traces the "frictions" that arise in always-local engagements with universalist ideas about "prosperity, knowledge and freedom" (2005, 10). In this thesis, the ideas studied relate to "(the) economy" and the forging of other ways of doing economy. As an ethnography of "possibility", I track the creation of options, methods, strategies and tactics of engagement with what could be otherwise economies. This means the ideas under study *are* (exist) and *are-not* (do not exist) or are not-yet. My attempt in the writing of the thesis was to identify and track "the possible", which I do not conceptualize as a revolutionary object, but (quite the opposite), micro-practices or discourses whose effects might nonetheless be transformative. This situates my interest with the provisional and with the operation of hope – two areas which remain underdeveloped in the history of radical writing and theory-building. As I work through the description of events (often, though not exclusively, meetings), what I attempt to describe are the (in some ways) fleeting, inchoate, or emergent discursive practices. As elaborated by Foucault, discursive practices constitute: make possible or impossible modes of being, speaking, acting, recognizing and so on. Such practices divide – the true from the untrue; categorize – the general and the particular; order, arrange and make intelligible (2013); or in this study, make possible or impossible.

The thesis is descriptive in two ways. First, although the subject of the thesis *is* and *is not quite* about the two organizations – I'm interested in the ideas about "what's possible to do" and how those at each site engage with ideas of economy – the context and culture at each is important for what happened. That is, analysing the working of

ideas and their relation to possibility cannot be accomplished without understanding some of the finer nuances and larger cultural contexts at each site. This means the thesis is descriptive in that I describe the people and processes encountered. The second way the thesis is descriptive is that I aim to describe the “take up” and “working with”, “adding-to” or “subtracting-from” ideas, notions and theories about economic things. Again, this is another way that I mean this ethnography is more of an ethnography of ideas rather than an ethnography of a particular group or organization.

The narrative style I use is uncharacteristic of most ethnographies, which aim to produce a documentarian “real” via showing rather than telling. Although the narrative style I use in the following chapters changes – often because of whether I’m drawing on science studies or psychoanalysis modes – what is largely consistent is that I do a lot of telling rather than showing. This is a conscientious decision on my part: first because my goal was not to write the “full story” of development or change at either organization, and telling is a deliberate strategy of not pretending or even being interested in “the full story”. Second, although there are often a lot of important, interesting and big events going on in each chapter, my intellectual concerns are often with “small” moments or very slight concerns with theoretical practices: in order to get to those “small” things, I necessarily must tell rather than take time showing. This allows me to get to the heart of the matter of concern I wish to examine.

The narrative style I use is also in keeping with the kind of literal recordings produced during research. The construction of research materials differed at each site and impacted the thesis greatly. Fundamentally, this stemmed from how I situated myself as a researcher versus researcher-and-participant at each site respectively. At Catalyst,



because I was often literally writing hand-written transcripts and descriptions of what was happening, my notes were ordered (dated, chronological). In the most practical sense, this meant I had long notes to quote from when it came time to write. In contrast, research notes of the same caliber generated at the E-PAZ were hit-and-miss: While writing minutes at a meeting, I might also write what I thought at the time were short “pregnant phrases”, for instance. Often these were notes of things I had heard before (i.e. they were things spoken that I could recognize as “already meaning something” within the discussion at hand); or were particularly contentious ideas. The problem with such notes were the gaps, including the gap in the time between events and writing. To put it in the most practical terms, phrases do not make good quotes. And sometimes remembering the full context of a given situation from such notes was difficult, especially because the writing happened long after the events described. This is particularly the case in chapter four, where the events spanned two years. Making *quotable* notes is simply not conducive of *participatory* research: the long transcript-style notes that I took at Catalyst were the result of only focusing on watching and writing down what was happening – it was incredibly documentary. At the E-PAZ, I was completely involved in helping organize and put on events, participating in discussion and debate at meetings and so on.

When it came time to write, I decided to relish the differences in the textual traces I had collected and made<sup>20</sup>. I recognized, for example, that the material collected at Catalyst was exactly the kind of material needed to write “science studies” pieces, since I had recorded “step-by-step” of people working with ideas, interacting with spreadsheets and the like. In contrast, at first, although voluminous, my E-PAZ collection of notes, posters, and emails seemed ephemeral. This could be because major decisions often took

months rather than a couple of meetings, as was the case at Catalyst. A tight narrative of research materials was difficult to compose with the E-PAZ material. In the writing stage, I often returned to the general listserv the group had established to help me reconstruct an order of events. In addition, as I came to realize, research material from the E-PAZ was also very much written “on” my body, inscribed through emotion – something I did not recognize until I was well into the drafting stage. Although both sites involved ethnographic methods, the resulting research material collected / made at each site was quite different, highlighting how research is affected by one’s stance and levels of engagement.

My approach to the construction of ethnography follows Clifford Geertz’s ideas on ethnography-as-text (1988). Ethnographic description and the inherent difficulty of ethnographic verifiability, Geertz (1988) argues, is par for the course in ethnography given “the oddity of constructing texts ostensibly scientific out of experiences broadly biographical, which is after all what ethnographers do” (10). He notes that while generations of ethnographers have oscillated between “finding somewhere to stand in a text that is supposed to be at one and the same time an intimate view and a cool assessment” (10), how “authorial uneasiness” (4) or any other “anxieties” that emerge when ethnography is examined and proclaimed as “text” cannot be solved by mis-describing the issue as methodological. As he puts it, ethnography not only “aris[es] from the complexities of self / other negotiations [but also from] self / text ones” (11). Although “explicit representations of authorial presence” are no longer “relegated, like other embarrassments, to prefaces, notes, or appendixes” (16), Geertz is concerned with what could be called a commodification of ethnography as method and as science. (He

makes the case that ethnography is and must be an art.) Some readers of the thesis describe it as “autobiographical”, but I caution against this reading / characterization – although it is true that if any “self” or “body” is described it is my own, the only exception being in one of the E-PAZ chapters where I describe a person who is basically being a jerk. Descriptions of people’s physicality are largely absent and purposefully so. Explaining why requires a further exploration about conceptions of ethnography (the place of the text and author within them), and, to situate this thesis, a few examples of how scholarly work from the 1980s in Anthropology influenced some of the textual decisions I made.

As Geertz explains, regardless of how fieldwork is practiced (note taking practices, length of time, etc.), it is impossible to avoid (or get rid of) the textuality of ethnography<sup>21</sup>. By this Geertz means that one cannot get around the “fact that all ethnographical descriptions are homemade, that they are the describer’s descriptions, not those of the described” (144-145). He is not advocating lies, or, (what he asserts is a more serious concern) doing away with “the burden of authorship” (146). Instead, he says his concern and the “anxieties” that appear once the fiction of an unmediated text is given up *deepen* the burden of authorship (146).

Here, I could speak to the time before the text as well as the process of writing. The time before the text – the period of time spent re-reading notes, shuffling papers, wondering what possibly to write about – was also the time when I decided what not to write, what not to show, and what the consequences were for each decision (for many of the decisions were impactful and often against the norm: they required thinking and a decision because of this). Some such decisions and refusals are no doubt made of my own

proclivities, some of my ethics, politics, and indeed, the limits of my own interdisciplinary knowledge.

I cannot describe each and every textual decision I made, but I will offer a couple of examples that are illustrative. One such textual decision was that I decided not to make much of the differences between Catalyst and the E-PAZ. It was not because I did not recognize the differences between them that I decided not to make it a topic in the text. Catalyst is a registered non-profit with government funding, and E-PAZ is a collection of organizations, some worker cooperatives, some non-registered associations, others non-profits – many that share a distrust or critique of government non-profit funding, and with it, a critique of charity. While these are differences aplenty, I was a bit suspicious of talk that suggested those differences made them polar opposites. Such talk seemed convinced that there was one type of organization that was the absolute “best” for alternative economies. The apex. So I made the decision not to be concerned too much about the differences between the two sites because I question the veracity of the concern and concentration of the differences between them. Surely one proclaims to be more radical than the other, and the other strives to be “mainstream”. But, it seemed to me, these kind of distinctions, disagreements, characterizations and self-aggrandizements were irrelevant if my interest was on how each engaged with ideas about economy or flirted with the otherwise (economic) possibilities they were creating. I thus sought to ignore an obvious, likely expected, and altogether familiar grid of intelligibility – treating it almost as if it did not exist. I could do so because within my terms of reference, such a grid was irrelevant.

Something similar could be said about my approach to writing ethnography. Some of my writing decisions were informed by academic discussions about the politics and ethics of ethnography as well as discussions I had with one of my E-PAZ friends, *A*, on the the same topic. Indeed, one of the reasons I wanted not to produce a visualist or documentarian style in this ethnography stemmed from discussions with *A*, a friend and intellectual colleague from the E-PAZ, on the history of ethnography (eg. its colonizing gaze, its role in colonialization) and contemporary forms of codifying (i.e. stealing) knowledge, especially from marginalized “others”. *A* would often raise the concern about the inherent dangers of representing political dissidents / misfits in academic work, information which has been known to be used by police or governments and is not more accessible than ever via the internet. These were issues of which I was well aware, and ones that for most of the time I was doing the research, especially in the specific context of the E-PAZ, I did not have answers for.

The weight of the above concerns remained with me. In many ways, my “answer” is not that I *cannot* represent those I met at the E-PAZ or Catalyst, but that “identifying” or “individualizing” representations were not necessary in this work. Early readers who are critical of my approach are right to point out that who gets represented is myself. But that alone does not make the text “autobiography”. If it was, I would be more concerned to describe the making / remaking / performativity of “myself” as researcher, PhD student, once-upon-a-time E-PAZer, social enterprise advocate and so on – all identities / identifications I took on in the process of research and writing.

Introspective, deconstructive and political readings of ethnography (as practice, as tool of colonialism, as ethically troublesome or methodologically troublesome) are well-

worn themes in Anthropology at least since the 1986 publication of *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus). An iconoclastic volume, the outcome of which were approaches to ethnography somewhat self-aware that its monographs were “partial truths” (Clifford). Out of the (imagined?) ashes of *Writing Culture* emerged other “ethnographic possibilities” (Clifford 1986, p. 19), including drawing on ethnographic experience to write plays or redefining the object of ethnography as no longer needing to be concerned with “culture” or “societies” but could also study ideas, knowledge, or things.

Out of the above, one question that came to predominate was “how do you represent others?” (or the other). The predominant answer to this question, particularly when others were marginalized others or others in which the power between researcher and researched is lop-sided, was to attempt to include or record the voice of the researched. Not just the “voice of” participants (which has been critiqued as a kind of ventriloquism, see Geertz, 145) but to cite a recent example, the voices of activist engagements with and productions of academic knowledge and concepts (Escobar 2008). As interesting and critically insightful as such texts may be, these approaches are two possible answers to address the production of ethnography with a long-view of its practice as inherently and inadvertently caught up in colonial and military exercise.

What is common to both is that they remain largely true to a visualist (or documentarian) mode. Here description serves to “paint a picture” of the group or individuals – their landscape, gestures, sartorial choice or comportment<sup>22</sup>. What I have done instead is to only “paint pictures” (i.e. engage in description) of things or people when absolutely necessary to the events or process at hand; what I reject specifically is

the use of a visualist approach to produce the textual effect of empiricism (or “truth”). What needs to be seen? Who needs to see what? My approach of showing only what needs to be shown in order to produce along the way the analysis may be strange, but the benefit from my perspective is it puts the “flashlight” on my object of concern. There may be much to disagree with in its approach, but it is another answer to the aforementioned concerns about representation by academics (to academics) or the commodification of knowledge or concerns about some knowledge and information presented here being open to appropriation by government or police.

The advantage to this approach was it forced me to write “the group”, the dynamic of people, often a changing group with the focus remaining on the ideas and “otherwise possibilities” as they were created, identified, elaborated, dismissed and so on in the process of meetings or events. Keen readers will also note that I do this more in the E-PAZ chapters than in those situated at Catalyst. Again, this was because the issues this approach was designed to address were issues by and for those at the E-PAZ. (Just because I do not make much of the differences between the two organizations / groups, does not mean that they cannot be addressed differently by a text.) I have come to appreciate the approach in an unexpected way: it gives way to the idea that “seeing all” is the only the way texts can be informative, insightful, thought-provoking (granting, of course, that some readers will not find this text to be any of these). It is an approach that shows only what is necessary.

I would like now to turn away from meta-theoretical and ethical concerns about ethnography to write more about the material on which the text was based (and constrained by). Beyond simply the traces of “stuff” (notes, recordings, photographs) that

research can generate, there were additional methodological consequences that followed from the kind and extent of my participation at each site. As noted, the resulting research notes were different. Now I want to say just a little more about each site, specifically how they were markedly different research experiences, and how this did not simply affect the notes made but the very research made. At the E-PAZ, I was a participant-observer, meaning I got involved in decision-making and other activities related to making the building purchase possible (fundraisers, administration, and so on). Importantly, being a participant-observer meant I became emotionally involved in what happened at the E-PAZ, and involved in the emotional lives of my fellow participants. As I noted above, those emotions were written on my body – even if it took me a long time to realize it.

The idea that bodies, our emotions and affect<sup>23</sup> can be research tools, and often are without conscious effort, remains a fringe methodology (Crang 2003; Parr 2001). As Parr puts it, “Despite academic geography’s recent engagement with studies of the body, few researchers have highlighted the centrality of the corporeal to processes of investigation” (2001, 159). Although there are only a couple of instances of very pointed “body” work in the thesis itself, during my fieldwork, the effect on bodies was intense and pointed. People commonly “burned out”. People shook (from anger, for example). Or their voices croaked. Or they stopped talking. Or people danced. (Not all the bodily stuff was bad!)

Bodily and / or emotional energy was remarked on before, during and after meetings. “Feelings” were communal and individual. I can recall many after-meeting phone calls (“check-ins”). Then there was a ten-minute (and quite literal) fit I had at home the morning of a fundraising social I had been a part of organizing<sup>24</sup>. To say that the E-PAZ was intense at times would be an understatement. The larger point however is



that as a researcher, I formed major emotional investments with the place, the project, and with those I worked. The events there “marked” me. Nor was I alone in having an intense relationship with the E-PAZ. Indeed, so many of the contentions and difficulties of the E-PAZ’s formation as a cooperative and our bid to purchase the building we tenanted stemmed from the emotional meaning invested in the building, its history as a “radical activist” meeting place and its uncertain future. Or from the sometimes overly / hyper-critical atmosphere.

In contrast, at Catalyst, I assumed the strict role of observer. I interviewed and chatted with staff, sat in on meetings or at a desk in the Catalyst office. But I did not get involved, rarely expressed my opinion, and (largely) kept my politics to myself. As for emotional investments, like most workplaces, there were emotive things going on – coordinators yelling at journeymen, for example – and decisions being made that impacted participants in the Catalyst’s training program that I might morally agree or disagree with. Yet such events were just that: events to analyze rather than events to “do something about”. Decisions did not affect me on an emotional level: They didn’t wake me up in the middle of the night, turn my stomach into knots or rattle me in the ways events at the E-PAZ did<sup>25</sup>. Recognizing that my stance at each was markedly different is also to call attention to the fact that the research “materials” made / collected at each site was different. This is not to say that I did not care about what was happening at Catalyst; but it is to acknowledge that my response was analytical.

The inclusion of the affective realm in the E-PAZ chapters was thus a consequence of the method and role I took on there. That the emotive / bodily was a research tool at all was accidental. This will be apparent in the somewhat awkward ways I insert my own

body into the analytic discussion in Chapter 2 and attempt to characterize the affective space in Chapter 4.

In differentiating the research experiences, I am not claiming that my presence at Catalyst was akin to being a “fly on the wall”. As I imagine of all research situations, my presence was marked and remarked on by newcomers to Catalyst, visitors and staff. My positionality – as white, middle-class-looking, educated – was of note. Relationships, for example, with those who assumed I shared their positionality (white, middle-class, educated ... and politically left!) sprang up, and relationships with those who I did not assume that I share anything in common with them were forged slowly (Aboriginal and Metis staff, trades-people, “non-university”-educated). Graciously, I was given the space to watch others make, modify and order knowledge.

As noted, my involvement at the E-PAZ was an immersion. What was relevant and not for research purposes was not clear and often far from my mind (see Petray 2012 and Parr 2001 for accounts of similar research experiences). Indeed, my “research notes” were more often than not scribbles of “things to do” and meeting minutes. There are no transcripts of long conversations and “check-in / debrief” phone calls (the kind of things that happen after long and vexed meetings). The traditional research materials I did collect – formal interviews with members from some of the groups; copies of meeting minutes; listserv discussion threads; promotion and governance material – seemed hardly adequate as traces of the making of the E-PAZ Cooperative. Yes, they could tell some of the story of the Cooperative, but the narrative alone was, I thought, rather boring – and not quite what mattered. More interesting were the few instances of thinking otherwise (Chapter 2), and in what I came to recognize as a unacknowledged or articulated

“philosophical” question that cut through so much of our talk, What does it mean to be cooperative? How do we become cooperative? (A subject I take up in Chapter 4).

### *Interviews and participation*

In addition to the many hours of observation and work within E-PAZ and Catalyst, the thesis is informed by participation in a variety of learning activities – some offered by the organizations themselves but the majority by supporting institutions. Activities included day or half-day workshops, networking events or press events, and working groups (for example, on social enterprise or financing for alternative economic projects). At the beginning of the project, I also conducted over twenty-five individual interviews with executive directors, managers, workers and activists who met with me to talk about their experience within their respective organizations, their histories and interest in “alternative economies” and their reflections on the same. Readers will note that neither the learning activities nor the interviews have a predominate role in any of the chapters – indeed, interviews from these sources are drawn on directly less than a handful of times throughout the thesis. Interviews and attendance at learning events were nonetheless important for establishing relationships and the domain – the geography *and* the “thinking space” – of this ethnography. In this, the ethnography may be unconventional.

Although I had originally planned on drawing on interviews directly, as the research progressed and when it came time to write, I realized my interest was not, say, with the broad and varied opinions of what goes into making or sustaining community economies, but with the detailed, everyday, and intimate practices of actually bringing such economies to life: I was interested in the ““doing thinking” that Gibson-Graham described rather than talking about doing or reflecting on doing. I realized quite late then

that interviews were not the best source for such material: interviewees had a lot of reflections on their work and on concepts like “community” or the meaning of “community economic development”, but these comments could not show how ideas met action in the everyday. And I was interested in how people used or “ushered” ideas and concepts in the doing of their work. I refer to such activities in the thesis as “theoretical practices”, a phrase I borrow from Althusser (1990).

As I wrote, however, I came to realize that despite not needing to use the interviews directly, they still had a role to play in the making of this project. Doing interviews presented an opportunity to become familiar with the networks of alternative businesses, cooperatives and organizations in the city and of course the people that worked within them. Interviewees included managers and bureaucrats, as well as program coordinators and workers. The vast majority of interviewees were not new to the field of alternative economic projects or organizations, and most of those interviewed had moved between types of organizations (for instance, from a worker cooperative to a non-profit organization)<sup>26</sup>. The time interviewees spent with me shaped the thesis in two important ways: offering multiple perspectives of the field, and secondly, providing a cognitive map of networks between and among organizations, projects and people. Let me discuss each in turn, while also relating the interview material to the ethnographic.

1. *Varied perspectives of the field.* Interviewees had a lot to say about the types and designs of (what went for) “community economic development” and “alternative economies”, and they often offered concrete examples from their experiences in working in differently directed efforts. One interviewee, for example, whose history included advocating and starting cooperatives but who had since moved into starting a social

enterprise aimed at creating employment in the inner city, had much to say on the different challenges of starting a worker cooperative from the challenges of starting a social enterprise, even when each project might have similar aims, like worker-ownership or worker-control. In this way, conducting interviews afforded the opportunity to hear about the “world” of CED / alternative and non-capitalism that participants were actively involved and networked within.

Such material, however, was not the same as the ethnographic material. With the latter, I could witness (and take part in) pushing these limits and limitations further: by wondering aloud (“what if...”; “how about...”) or by presenting other facts, arguments or considerations. Likewise, the ethnographic material was witness to extended discussion and privy to shifts in mood, posture and the interpretive know-how that comes from getting to know others. Metaphorically, if the interviews sometimes referenced instances of “thinking otherwise, doing something else”, at both field sites, I could see fits of start and stop – the *doing* of thinking otherwise – and the gap between the act(s) of thinking otherwise from “doing something else”. That is, I was witness to (and at the E-PAZ a part of) the analytical, emotional, and sometimes political “blockages” that held back thinking about doing economy. Although interviewees could tell me about their own experiences of failed projects or express negative evaluations of specific ones, such evaluations were already framed / analyzed by the interviewee. This was fine except the stories that interviewees told me could not get at the everyday and the processes involved in making community economies. As said, I was precisely interested in those details.

What the interviews did verify was that my theoretical interests were not misplaced. The interviews were often inspiring, specifically for the variety of projects and activities

participants told me about. Many of those I interviewed told me about examples of (often short-lived) experiments in community economies: from selling eggs off the back of a bicycle to attempting to start a community bike shop in a punk-house<sup>27</sup> basement. In this way, the interviews not only offered a cognitive map to a network of informal associations and incorporated organizations or businesses, but to a diverse local world of community economic activity. In a way, this allowed me to read Gibson-Graham's work as not just "pie-in-the-sky" theory published by the University of Minnesota Press, but a familiar description of diverse economic activities. Lastly, even though my research was not aimed at making comparisons between organizations, there were certainly similar themes and talk across the interviews. I used this material to aid in my interpretation of similar (or differing) talk at the ethnographic field sites. The most clear example of this will be found in Chapter 3, which I open discussing what I call "SE talk", or the ways that social enterprise educators, developers and managers talked about their conception of social enterprise. The interviews were essential background work for understanding the complex social and economic geographies at both sites.

2. *Networks and interconnections.* Geographically, although the two organizations studied did not have much to do with each other, they were none the less networked via the movement of staff and through the extent of relations each had with other organizations, whether as suppliers, purchasers, or through industry associations. I have tried to capture some of these networked relations in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 shows the formal partnerships developed between both primary sites and a host of other non-profit, social enterprise or cooperative businesses (hard line), and the non-formal connections between the same. Non-formal connections tended to be made up of knowledge transfers

of one type or another – often policy or industry research, governance issues and so on. The (non-apparent) connectivity between my two sites is perhaps the result of working in a mid-sized city in Canada’s prairie provinces. It is also suggestive of the fact that in contrast to what on the surface might be taken as large differences between the organizations – one being outwardly political and “self organized”, the other being non-partisan and a non-profit – the organizations via this network have much in common. The first, already noted, is that both organizations share the expertise or knowledge produced within a larger network. Sharing knowledge can be carried through personnel or through the various associations in which each are members. Figure 2 shows this in another way, illustrating the activities, in terms of sales and purchases, with this same network. Both organizations either act as suppliers of goods and services or make significant purchases from within the same network. This speaks to the behind-the-scenes work of creating an integrated market of social, or ethical, purchasing – itself often the work of associations.

The interest is not here one of comparison, but perspective. For instance, having interviewed a number of managers from social enterprises, I knew that the definitional battles surrounding “social enterprise” – so prevalent in the emerging literature – were almost irrelevant to them. (Not that they could say why precisely.) Their “cross-eyed” looks and deep sighs lent interpretive interest to watching how researchers I met while at Catalyst approached “social enterprise”. It helped me contextualize, as elaborated in Chapter 2, why the executive director of Catalyst was so keen to narrativize Catalyst through tours to all kinds of visitors: not because he was seeking directly to settle the definitional debates around social enterprise, but because he intuitively believed that “social enterprise” could be something more (or different) than simply “business + social

mandate”. Indeed, his seemingly “bizarre” bringing together of issues contrasted wildly with that of two researchers who operated with exactly the definition of social enterprise that Catalyst’s executive director resisted. The interviews with social enterprise managers alerted me to a disconnect between their understanding of social enterprise and the ways social enterprise was being (rather quickly) being codified into academic knowledge.

What the social enterprise managers could not tell me was what it was they found unhelpful, even irrelevant, about the academic literature’s seemingly exclusive focus on definitions. But the fact that they did note the academic literature’s “irrelevance” alerted me to a dissonance that was relevant in the field. Without doing the interviews, I would not have been able to make sense of my ethnographic observations in the way that I have.

### *Interpretive strategies*

I have already indicated that theory – and the interpretive strategies offered by theory – play an important role in this thesis. Indeed, because this thesis is interpretive, “theory” can be said to play a methodological role. In addition to the specific strategies offered by Gibson-Graham, the interpretive devices offered by science studies and psychoanalysis were particularly influential. Both approaches aided me in recognizing, ordering and deciphering the material encountered. Whereas science studies largely aided me in examining a thematic of knowledge / possibility, psychoanalytical approaches helped me navigate a thematic of becoming / possibility. (Each thematic is discussed in the chapter descriptions below.) Let me discuss each interpretive device in turn.

### *Science studies*

Although approaches vary, science studies “strays into philosophy” (Law 2004, 8) often because researchers who have studied science (and more recently social science)



question the Enlightenment and positivist legacy that posited researchers should be (and can achieve) impartiality, both in terms of subjective and societal modes of judgment (Latour 1987, 2010; Haraway 1989, 1997). Science studies researchers have investigated the mundane making of scientific knowledge by examining the discrete practices that go into making scientific facts. The emphasis in such an approach is on practice or action. “Knowledge” in this sense does not simply appear, but is made through gathering, sorting as well as employing reading devices (instruments) and so on. In this view, it is not only humans that are granted agency, so too are “inert” instruments as well as non-humans, natural events (like weather) and so on. More recently, research practices developed by science studies have been used to study the making of objects like “the economy” or the stock market (MacKenzie 2009). MacKenzie and others (Callon 1998), for example, have studied in detail the ways that “combinations of human beings, material objects, technical systems, texts, algorithms, and so on” are marshalled to (re)create markets. In these ways, as an approach, science studies aims to put in the forefront the materiality of making worlds, be they scientific bodies of knowledge or indeed markets.

The methodological assumption is that “conceiving markets as constituted by practice allows us to account for the import of market ideas in shaping markets. Both in terms of *what* ideas participate and *how* these ideas participate” (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2007, 154). Where and when assemblages of various actants come together, Callon calls them performed (2007, 25). Methodologically, I take up Callon’s (1998, 2007) suggestion that economies are performed. What this means is that rather than assuming an already-existing economy, the collections of economic “theories, models and statements ... actively engage in the constitution of the reality that [they] describe” (2007, 20)<sup>28</sup>. Callon

suggests that “economic things,” be it economic knowledge or the market, are coproduced among humans, material devices (like calculators and spreadsheets) and other non-human actants (such as algorithms) (Callon and Muniesa 2005, 1245; Callon 2007). One of the conclusions he takes from this – again, a philosophical one – is that economies are best described as performed. In what I read as an extension of science studies, a phrase like the “performativity of market theories” focuses our attention on “how ideas about markets ... take part in shaping markets” (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2007, citing Callon 1998 at 138). The performing economies literature therefore has begun to include (rather ephemeral) objects like “ideas” as a kind of practice. It is the coming together of ideas and their inscription in tables, text and the like that constitutes the performance itself. Importantly, this work focuses attention on materiality and often draws on ethnographic research to “follow” the making of economic things, be they markets or pricing models (MacKenzie and Millo 2003).

In terms of methodological implications and practice, the influence of science studies on this thesis has meant I have paid attention to “devices” like spreadsheets. Rather than just take spreadsheets as inert or uninteresting, science studies taught me to pay attention to the activities of “things” and their role in “making” knowledge. Except for the case of crossing paths with the two researchers in Chapter 3, I did not have much of a chance to observe the making or extended use of objects like spreadsheets; but importantly, I do not ignore them. In Chapter 2, for example, the fact that there was a spreadsheet outlining market rental rates – one which came from a market assessment of the building – weighed heavily on the discussion among E-PAZ members when they had to decide how much they were going to charge themselves for their respective spaces.

That is, even my cursory use of science studies allowed me to recognize items like spreadsheets as “actants”: as things that profoundly shaped or acted upon the discussion and / or “items of concern” (Latour’s term) as they developed<sup>29</sup>.

My use of science studies is piecemeal, and I don’t make any attempt to fully adopt the language of science studies. I call attention to the influence of science studies on this work because there are times throughout the ethnography where we will see people making and working with things like spreadsheets, creating tables that divide their chosen objects of knowledge into categories. I point to these devices because, much as science studies scholars suggest, these practices are the material making of “possibility” as this study understands it. In a different context, Callon has argued that such an approach “makes it possible to exhibit the struggle between worlds that are trying to prevail” (Callon 2007, 28). Indeed, science studies has always employed ethnography and – at least in the ways their early ethnographies showed how “knowledge” was made – produced what were arguably the first “idea” ethnographies (Latour and Woolgar 1979).

Following Callon’s statement above, the thesis will provide empirical evidence of some of the ways that ideas about capitalism, like its supposed dominance, and more particularly, its express purchase on concepts like “rent” can sideline, even preclude, other ways of imagining a community economy. In such a way, methodological approaches as developed by science studies researchers provide tools for tracing the (re)creation of knowledge / truth. Studying the devices that literally “make up” representations of economic knowledge can push us to question some ways of doing economy, and perhaps open avenues for performing the economy otherwise (Barry and Slater 2002). Chapters 2, 3 and 4 all draw attention to the literal movement and making of

knowledge developed by science studies.

### *Psychoanalysis*

The fourth chapter employs both the methods and interpretive devices offered by psychoanalysis. Although both Chapters 4 and 5 revolve around becoming / possibility, Chapter 4 warranted the addition of a new interpretive method in what is an exploration of the process of ongoing negotiation in building / sustaining community economies. I became interested in describing the effort of “stammering”, “not-knowing” and cultivating other(wise) economies and selves that Gibson-Graham make reference to in their work<sup>30</sup>. Psychoanalysis was helpful in this regard, especially since it offers interpretive devices open (and quite insistently so!) to the uncertainty of our interpretations. This seems an ethical position to take given that nothing is more uncertain than processes of becoming. What I take from psychoanalysis is not a mechanical analysis of events and things, but a kind of curiosity about the unspoken, perhaps unspeakable, identifications among ideas, identities and ways of being in the world as they encounter the so-called “known”, the said, and the pressures to conform to particular “apparent” truths, or accept specific “realities”.

I have filed my use of psychoanalysis under methodology for two reasons. First, psychoanalysis is founded through talk. Talk (and lots of it!) was the premier method in which I witnessed people seeking to explore their social relations, particularly at the E-PAZ. Second, the methodological task of any psychoanalyst is to build a story made up from talk; and the history of psychoanalysis allows for the use of metaphor, fables, legends and the like, as narrative devices to tell a story of what is being worked through by the talk of the patient. This is a contrast to perhaps more “sociological” case studies,

which tend to present linear narratives of their subjects. In this thesis, by referring research encounters to some of the interpretive devices offered by psychoanalysis, my aim was to allow the ethnographic material and the narrative constructed to tell a story about what it is like to “stammer”, “not know”, and “think otherwise” about the economy<sup>31</sup>. At the same time it means that my story of the economy is not straightforward, simple or certain, but is instead messy and often emotional<sup>32</sup>.

I use the descriptor of “encounter” here and there throughout the text. It often refers quite specifically – if not obviously – to the “what” under examination. The clearest example of this is Chapter 5, where I describe the “moment” Catalyst’s coordinators encounter workfare policy. In all chapters, it should be noted that I focus on quite specific things or objects, even as I note and cite as important other goings-on. For example, Chapter 2 is concerned quite specifically with the discussions the E-PAZ had about rent. Although property – its conception, theories about it, and its relation to the question of rent – is relevant, the analysis places concern about property in the background. This is not because property is unimportant; it is because the chapter is specifically concerned about thinking otherwise and rent. Likewise, Chapter 3 can be read an “encounter” of ideas and conceptions of social enterprise. Some readers may be off-put by my lack of fidelity to either science studies or psychoanalysis; throughout I use such concepts as they provide the tools I need in order to describe the “theoretical practices” (Althusser 2009) under study. Gibson-Graham and other postcapitalist scholars have begun to wade into psychoanalysis for further thinking about subjectivity (see Graham and Amariglio 2006). My draw on psychoanalysis is not so much on well-worn and (to my mind rendered) neat concepts, but to its interest in reasonable-if-nonsensical actions and emotions, and the

ways fantasy and flights of imagination come into play in social relations. This is an understanding of social relations as complex, as fraught with emotional, as well as true and not-true content. And it is an understanding that the helpfulness of psychoanalysis is not that it can bring a sense of certainty in the possibility of transformation – of which there is a long history of social scientists and radical theorist who attempt to use psychoanalysis in such a way (see Callard 2003). Rather, the “helpfulness” of psychoanalysis is that it accepts that irrational actions and “silly” mistakes are empirically interesting, and are certainly more than just faulty or failed logic that should be (somehow) banished from the scene of social relations. Indeed, psychoanalysis begins when it is accepted that “faulty logic” cannot be banished from social relations. My own position is that psychoanalysis has much to offer political analysis, but not if it is reduced to finding certainty (-as-cure). And like David Sibley (2003), a fellow geographer who draws on “an enthusiastic” psychoanalysis, I am not concerned with an exegesis of Freud or other “big name” psychoanalysts.

### **Theoretical overview and description of chapters**

Following Gibson-Graham, the thesis views economic possibility as a mode of politics; that is, as not so much a blueprint to “set the world right” but a set of attempts, strategies and stances towards the world(s of economy) which aim to activate participation in shaping and enlivening economies. Certainly, as we will see, both Catalyst and the E-PAZ are trying to “set the world right” – each in their own way, meaning they each have their own values and economic theories. Although their values and theories are relevant, and indeed, contextual, my interest in the chapters is to examine “what is possible to think”.

Throughout, I remain interested in efforts to “think otherwise, do something else, and become other than what one is” in the world(s) of economy. These words are taken from the philosopher Michel Foucault (1997a, 327), and speak to the substantial themes of this thesis. Indeed, in the chapters that follow I study the conditions of “otherwise” thinking about doing economy, examining what is possible for the communities under study to “think” in relation to mainstream and alternative ways of acting (or “being”) within their economy. By “possible to think” I mean this study examines the objects of knowledge that participants see (and, in some cases, make) “intelligible” (Foucault 2004). By intelligible, I’m not referring simply to opinions or even arguments, but to what Foucault called the “truth event” of certain discourses, that is, the very possibility of saying something about a given thing. To describe the “intelligible” is to describe

“...the set of conditions which, at a given moment and in a determinate society, govern the appearance of statements, their preservation, the links established between them, the way they are grouped in statutory sets, the role they play, the action of values or consecrations by which they are affected, the way they are invested in practices or attitudes, the principles according to which they come into circulation, are repressed, forgotten, destroyed or reactivated.” (Foucault 1994, 309)

I have organized the thesis along two analytic grids. In the first half of the thesis, I focus on (mostly non-academic) economic knowledge, and an analytic grid I have come to think of as possibility / knowledge<sup>33</sup>. Here, I understand knowledge in a Foucauldian, post-structuralist sense, or what Gibson-Graham, Resnick and Wolff call a “vision of knowledges” that is viewed as “implicated in and constitutive of power, and as an important medium through which other social processes are constructed” (2001, 20). As Gibson-Graham et al put it:

“from a poststructuralist perspective, knowledge is plural, contradictory, and powerful rather than singular, cumulative, and neutral. It actively shapes ‘reality’

rather than passively reflecting it. The production of new knowledges is a world-changing activity, one that repositions other knowledges and empowers new subjects, practices, policies, and institutions.” (20)

By saying I study economic knowledge then, I mean those things that are predominantly understood as “economic”, like “rent”, markets (as in “the property market”), “business” (often “versus ‘the social’ or even ‘non-business’”) and the like. These, of course, are already particular knowledge technologies – accomplishments, human-made – and it can be argued, cultural (Hudson 2004; Swanson 2005).

Chapter 2, Thinking Rent Otherwise, follows the discussion of possible ways to determine rental rates at the E-PAZ once (or at the time, if) the Co-op was the owner of their building. There, members of the (then newly-minted) E-PAZ Cooperative debate matters of property and rent, specifically as it relates to “capitalism”. Although I argue that their anti-capitalism is largely capitalocentric, I also show that this does not necessarily limit the emergence of otherwise ideas. What happens to “new”, bold or even brazen proposals in this context is interesting (even harrowing), and is the focus of the chapter. I focus in particular on a moment where even entertaining the possibility of otherwise ideas about how they could divvy up rent was deemed audacious by a self-styled “elder” in the larger E-PAZ community. What’s notable, I argue, is not that the ways his status as some kind of “pillar of (the Marxist) community” is fashioned – but rather the gendered ways he upheld “Knowledge” and “Economic truth”. What is harrowing is that despite their knowledge of other actually existing otherwise ways of doing rent, members of the E-PAZ Co-op easily gave up on their initial efforts to explore otherwise options. What I aim to explore in the chapter then are the ways this came about. As I argue, dominant economic knowledge was confirmed via gendered violence



and silencing. I also use the chapter as an opportunity to flesh out the use of “otherwise” in this thesis.

Chapter 3, *Performing Social Enterprise*, retains the focus on knowledge, but examines knowledge in its performed sense (see above). The chapter offers a contrasting take on social enterprises: one that understands social enterprise in what I argue is a capitalocentric way, where social enterprise is simply the addition of concern for “the social” to already existing and “proven” business practices; and another that, in my reading, uses “social enterprise” as an “otherwise opportunity” to link diverse matters of concern (Latour). The first take on social enterprise is practically the definitional one as the notion of social enterprise has become codified, especially in academic literature and policy circles. In the chapter, such an understanding of social enterprise is embodied by two researchers charged with investigating Catalyst’s ROI for its government funders. In the chapter, I identify some of the follies they have to insist on in order to make such a limiting definition work. The larger point is to question the limitations placed on the possibilities of social enterprise when the idea is fused to capitalocentric ideas about business. The chapter contrasts this first performance with one offered by Catalyst’s executive director as he performs Catalyst via tours of their offices. There I examine the various ways he attempts to implode the (becoming) dominant meaning of social enterprise. The chapter illustrates some of the constraints placed on his performative definition, specifically, as imposed by government funders.

The second analytical grid the thesis employs is possibility / becoming. How do community economies “become” and how is it that both individuals and groups can become oriented towards them? Much like the first section, my ethnographic work shows

that hegemonic economic discourses that insist on a lack of economic agency are powerful forces that work against such becoming. Moving from a concern largely with knowledge to that of becoming means turning our attention to “the personal and the spaces closest in” (Gibson-Graham 2006, xi-xii) and to some of the non-cognitive ways of knowing “being”. Both chapters offer provisional tales and exploratory explanations. They follow Gibson-Graham’s interest in a politics of becoming as a key project for a postcapitalist politics.

By possibility / becoming otherwise, I do not just mean the ability to “think outside the box”. Although such a description may be apt in some respects, what it does not capture analytically is attention to discourse or the “pull” and performative effects of economic being. As a topical interest, studying possibility / becoming touches on imaginative, political and emotional capacities. Gibson-Graham make reference to what I mean here when they refer in the preface to their 2006 text to “the fortitude ... to address ... monumental issues and ... embodied insights” (x). It likewise can involve (attention to) “process[es] of self-cultivation that might equip us to become ethical subjects of a postcapitalist order” (x). These chapters are interested in exploring the “breathing space for fugitive energies of caring, social concern, and collectivity ... directed toward new performances of economy” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 51).

An interest in becoming is in many ways an interest in uncertainty – in who we are and who we might become as individuals meeting to build community economies. Unlike those Gibson-Graham worked with, whom they note could have a “patent lack of desire” for community economies (Gibson-Graham 2006, 24), the people I encountered had all kinds of passion and desire for otherwise worlds. This is not surprising given that they

were working within already existing community or alternative economic projects. But it did not mean that a cornucopia of economic possibility was readily available to those I encountered. Indeed, it was with some of Gibson-Graham's techniques in hand that I would often see the *dis*-counting of negotiations and making / sharing of community economic commons by individuals and groups I worked with. Encountering the various difficulties and stumbling blocks of enacting community economies, these two chapters are not so much about transformation (which "becoming" can easily infer) as much as what Örselçuk describes as "desire's occasion" for otherwise economies and a narration of its wanting (2006). Both chapters examine the ways otherwise activities and ways of being may be discounted, avoided or forestalled. Despite focus on what might be negative adventures, "desire's occasion" is present in each of these chapters, and is key: the members of the E-PAZ Cooperative want to be cooperative; the Coordinator's at Catalyst want to affect the local labour market.

Chapter 4, *Becoming Cooperative*, examines a "tic" that developed among members of the fledgling E-PAZ Cooperative – what I describe as a compulsive apology. The task of the chapter is to narrate the apology. I argue the apology was an unspoken desire to "become cooperative" (a social relation) via instituting a cooperative – the latter being merely an institutional form, the former being a set of social relations. I make this argument by situating the apology within the deep democracy members of the E-PAZ sought to create, if often, through instrumentalist means. The chapter highlights the folly of using grand schemes or blueprints to achieve economic justice; but it also puts us in touch with the more messy business of forming relations of reciprocity with others. I use the journey of overcoming the apology as an instance of what Gibson-Graham call "the

hard work of stitching”, or the ways that social relations and the community economies created within them require suturing, a process that can be painful. Situated within the world of cooperatives, and more specifically, worker cooperatives and organizations with a flat management structure, this chapter will be of particular interest to people thinking critically about cooperative education.

Chapter 5, *Encountering Workfare*, tracks the changing stance of Catalyst’s coordinating staff as they come to a critique of the labour market policies that fund Catalyst’s training program. Contrasting their resulting stance, which paints a picture of Catalyst as “band-aid”, with a broader set of activities at Catalyst, I suggest the so-called “boundaries” of what constitutes an intervention in the labour market can (and needs to) be productively questioned. Examining the process through which the coordinator staff disempowered themselves (and their take on the organization) when they undertook an analysis of Catalyst’s labour market interventions is instructive: methodologically allowing us to see how “the places closest in” not only describe individuals, but can also describe organizations and wider communities. Focused in particular on the coordinator’s encounter with labour market policy, I critically examine their resulting stance toward Catalyst in this context. Unsurprisingly, such a reading narrowed the field of possibility for intervening and enlivening the organization’s mandate of training and employment. The chapter offers an opportunity to ponder what a “positive” politics entails, specifically in the context of racialized labour markets in the post-welfare age. Taking this one step further, the chapter offers an experiment in imaginative thinking, offering another reading of Catalyst’s labour market interventions that encourage us not just to “take back the economy” but to “take back the labour market” as well.

The conclusion offers a short reflection on the research project and the resulting ethnography. In particular, I make an argument (and perhaps a plea) for writing about “what we don’t know how to write about” when it comes to the “internal” and nitty-gritty of social relations within burgeoning community economies. I also consider some of the benefits and drawbacks to the approach I’ve taken. Lastly, I frame my reflections in light of a return to the three types of politics Gibson-Graham charted out for us: a politics of language, of the subject, and collective action.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis aims to be both descriptive and critically reflective in that it is concerned with the work of two organizations and the ethical-political questions to which each community attends. Throughout, I describe the kinds of work (knowledge production; site-making; pedagogical efforts related to cultivating selves) happening there. I describe not unfettered freedom and possibility but the ways that possibility is wrought and constituted through struggles within and against (mainstream) economic discourse, including alternative ones. The struggles I recount cause epistemological as well as ontological unease. Some struggles have fantastic elements – they are emotional, sometimes rife with fantasy or flights-of-fancy – others are more mundane. The thesis, in these ways, is not so interested in the broad societal and theoretical implications of how we think economy and how we might “take the economy back”, but with the very hard work of journeying to build community economies, the nitty-gritty practice and material facilitation involved in making otherwise economies.

## Chapter Two: Thinking rent otherwise

Gibson-Graham argue that a capitalocentric approach to economy works to efface the political nature of economic decision-making and the social relations involved in negotiating how economies are “usually known and performed” (2006, 79). Capitalocentrism, or thinking economy in terms of and with ultimate reference to capitalism, “holds us back,” Gibson-Graham claim, by limiting our imagination of what’s possible economically. Thinking economies as performed (rather than preexisting) and performing economies “otherwise” are two aspects highlighted in their call for community economies, a project aimed at marking out (naming and claiming) other ways of doing economy. Gibson-Graham’s project, specifically in Chapter 4 of *A Postcapitalist Politics*, includes a call for the development of a discourse of community economies, one that is otherwise to mainstream economy as well as to “alternative” and community economic development approaches (approaches which can be capitalocentric). This chapter explores some of the challenges of responding to their call for the development of a discourse of community economies, specifically as it relates to the need to “think otherwise” about what’s possible in intervening and making economies. Drawing on participatory observation from within the E-PAZ Cooperative, the chapter examines more specifically the possibilities for and the difficulties of thinking rent otherwise. Doing so will allow us to explore in detail some of the hold backs to the further development of discourses of community economies vis-à-vis specific economic things (like “rent” or “property”) and its relation to capitalocentric notions of economy.

I became interested in the ways that “rent” could be thought otherwise, outside of or beyond (a narrative of) capitalist property relations while I was a participant in the E-

PAZ Cooperative's development. Our discussions of rent in that setting seemed both to present and, at times, to close down otherwise possibilities. Importantly, although members and workers at the E-PAZ would self-describe their group as "anti-capitalist", "alternative" and so on, these identities did not automatically bring forth "otherwise rent", or more precisely, the confidence to act on whatever otherwise ideas were dreamed up. The protracted discussions about rent and property made the Co-op an enchanting place in which to think about the notion of "thinking otherwise" and the problem of "what holds us back"<sup>34</sup>. Where some possibilities toward otherwise rent were presented and argued for pervasively, I became interested in how – through which strategies and discourses – some possibilities were deemed "stupid" or "out-of-touch with reality" and how it was that more common or normative notions of rent were paraded as "the way things are" – claims that asserted that there is little, if any, room to intervene in the making of (their) economy. Capitalocentrism, alternative economics and otherwise thinking circulated during our discussions in interesting, if puzzling (and sometimes annoying) ways.

E-PAZ members were knowledgeable about alternative approaches to thinking rent, such as bartering for payments, squatting and so on. Despite knowing that other ways of "doing rent" (or occupying space) were possible, when it came to negotiating how they would go about determining rent, trouble – contention, confusion, wringing-of-hands, group self-doubt – emerged. Following Gibson-Graham's work, I argue in this chapter that important in the development of a discourse of community economies is the need to examine why such "trouble" emerged. How was this trouble tied to usual (including "alternative") ways of thinking economy? My task in this chapter is not only to analyze

the trouble but also to capture something of its complexities; in this sense, trouble cannot be distilled to one cause. Being mindful of some of the complex difficulties specific community economies have to contend with opens up the possibility for multiple (and equally complex) avenues for intervention and indeed imagination.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the next section, I introduce the E-PAZ Cooperative in more detail, with the aim of elaborating the geographical conditions in which their discussions of rent and property came about. Drawing on Gibson-Graham's discussion of community economies, I describe the E-PAZ Cooperative as an "alternative" economic space where knowledge of "other ways of doing economy" were present, if tempered by capitalocentric discourses. We will be able to see this most clearly in the ways that individuals from the E-PAZ member groups conceptualized the project to purchase their building. My discussion will then put the E-PAZ member discussions about property and rent in conversation with existing academic literature on rent and property. I'll argue that many of E-PAZ's stated ideas about rent and property are not all that different from those of radical scholars; and, moreover, that both scholars and members of the E-PAZ have capitalocentric views on rent and property. However, despite an overall vision of economy and their role (or lack thereof) that tended to be strongly capitalocentric, I will show that E-PAZ members were not thereby precluded from other ways of thinking rent. The second section draws out the difference between being able to "think" otherwise and moving forward on such ideas. The last major section of the chapter explores in greater detail the dynamic of otherwise possibilities around rent. I specifically use two meetings in which cooperative members sought to determine how rent levels could be divided among tenants as an opportunity to observe how



otherwise ideas about thinking rent were, at times, rendered “fantastical” and out of the realm of possibility. There I deploy a feminist analysis of the gendered character of economy and economic talk to understand this particular case of strong capitalocentrism, and its aftermath. Finally, the chapter will highlight some of the hold backs<sup>35</sup> on developing discourses of community economies in an already-existing “alternative” economic project.

### **Community economies, thinking otherwise and the E-PAZ Cooperative**

Despite their politics (radical leftist), most E-PAZ members had what Gibson-Graham would call capitalocentric and mainstream views on what the economy is and how it works. Although the E-PAZ aimed to be an “alternative” (economic) space, its members’ views on economy were, at times, detrimental to developing a sense of how what they were doing was anything other than “just barely surviving” in a overlooked corner of “capitalism’s world”<sup>36</sup>. Missing was a theoretical elaboration of the E-PAZ as a community economy: that is, how to think about community economies beyond a capitalocentric frame. This chapter argues that the absence of such a frame was largely detrimental to their otherwise ideas.

First, we should consider what it means to think about economy outside such a frame, and how it relates to the notion of community economy as described by Gibson-Graham. Figuring economy “as a site of decision” rather than an “ultimate reality” or “container” (2006, 87) is a strategy Gibson-Graham employ as a way of encouraging the development of a discourse of community economy (87). Their desire is for “a conception of a community economy ... versatile enough to inspire economic imaginings without fixing them on any one fantasy of completion or salvation” (86). It is in this

context that Gibson-Graham use the term “community economy”, that is, not as an assumed or pre-constituted entity, but as a political discourse. As a discourse, community economy “articulates a set of concepts and practices concerned with economic interdependence” (2006, 79). Noteworthy about this definition is that Gibson-Graham do not aim to set out a fixed or universal definition of “community economy”. Indeed, they question attempts to do so, pointing to the history of “community” and “alternative” economic discourses are often concerned with setting up an ideal, universal or model of economy. In such cases, the economy remains figured as a container. With a focus instead on *discourse*, Gibson-Graham thus start with what they describe as a purposefully “empty” definition of community economies as sites that “constitute social and economic being,” and which start from “some recognition of economic co-implication, interdependency, and social connection” (2006, 82). Such a definition does away with the pre-constituted visions of economy, placing the focus on how economies are made and re-made (i.e. performed). All economies, they argue, do not stem from some pre-given, universal form of economy, but arise from “practices [that] involve ethical considerations and political decisions” (2006, 82). Postcapitalist economic projects thus aim to “identify sites where ethical economic decisions can be made around recognized forms of interdependence” (2006, 81), opening sites they call “sites of decision”. Such a “space of decision”, or decision space, is interested in opening and expanding the scope or extent of decision-making (2006, 83). Repoliticizing economy starts foremost with a view that the sociality of economy is “always present” (2006, 88)<sup>37</sup>.

The theoretical work Gibson-Graham provide in their chapter on community economy is an invitation to engage in a political-theoretical project that “emphasize[s] the

becoming of new and as yet unthought ways of economic being” (88). In the place of models or ideals, they suggest instead “ethical coordinates” that center around the creation of decision spaces – places to “negotiat[e] and explor[e] interdependence” (86) through “reflection, discussion ... and action” (88). In this way, their work in *A Postcapitalist Politics* suggests a starting point for emergent political discourses aimed at repoliticizing the economy<sup>38</sup>. I want to take up their project in what perhaps will be seen as a more immediately practical way, one that is closely tied to their equally fecund analyses of how economies are “known” and the ways in which discourses of economy, including “alternative” ones, are capitolocentric. How do usual ways of doing / thinking economy affect the decision space(s) and figure into the possibilities of building practical community economies?

To explore this question, in this chapter, I use a definition of “thinking otherwise” as that which (largely) does not fit with accepted economic knowledge (models, formulas and so on). Thinking otherwise, in this sense, is defined as an imaginative practice of “being-in-common” that signifies (what can be) the strange, or new, or even “almost thought” or “yet unthought” ways of thinking economy outside the usual ways of knowing or practicing economy. Thinking otherwise about economy can offer strange and new ways of doing economy – that is, the “otherwise” stuff is the result of enlivened economic imaginations that can create, through brainstorming for example, ways of making community economies<sup>39</sup>. The emphasis here is not on whether the ideas are good or bad, feasible or not, but that they exist at all *and* center concern around economic interdependence, negotiation and social relations<sup>40</sup>. Such strange ideas will be seen when we turn to the E-PAZ’s discussions about rent. What will be noticed is that although all

such practices involved in these discussions – “usual” and “strange” – are social; “usual” ways of doing economy (can) have the privilege of accepted or “proper” knowledge. My chapter is interested in studying how this is so, and how recourse to “proper” knowledge (in this case, usual ways of doing economy) come about<sup>41</sup>.

The precise example I use in this chapter will show that thinking otherwise rent was difficult in the face of instruments such as a spreadsheet of market rent numbers, which were available to the E-PAZ in the form of a market assessment done on their building, and which came to hold particular sway amongst the members, even as the majority of members also desired something else (that is, otherwise rent). The chapter will show the creation of a particular space of decision created by members of the E-PAZ Cooperative as they define and imagine what alternative property ownership could be. Here, members of E-PAZ test the extent of their economic imaginations to think otherwise as they confront and test the validity of established economic knowledge practices about or concerning rent (and to a lesser extent, property). Throughout, there will be moments where (some of) their more transformative visions for their project were blocked, briefly forestalled, lost, and occasionally took hold. It is these moments that are of interest in this chapter.

One of the difficulties of imagining what can be “otherwise” about rent “in the wild” (Callon 2006)<sup>42</sup> is that, like so many economic things, rent is often taken as the express domain of capitalist property relations. As put by members of the E-PAZ, property ownership and the power to determine rents can be understood in terms of “capitalist social relations” – quite simply, that those who own property use that property to make money from renters. This is true of commercially zoned property, which

primarily, treats property as a commodity through which private investors generate wealth. My approach in this chapter is to follow the conversation during E-PAZ meetings that asked “need this be so?” In other words, is moneymaking the only purpose of owning commercial property? Although much of their conversations about rent and property operated on the assumption that they could and should do something else (that is, something otherwise), there remained throughout a conviction that rent, property and the social relations therein were the definitive purview of (a rather abstract notion of) capitalism – and as such, were inescapable. Such an analytical lacune, despite their own actions and preferences, meant that members of the E-PAZ often described their activities as beholden to capitalism. This meant two things. First, there seemed to be broad cultural agreement among the group that little-to-no difference could be discerned from whether it was the E-PAZ holding title the building from a “random” capitalist doing the same. Buying property meant the E-PAZ was sacrificing an ideal and political credibility (“Property is theft”, discussed later), an ideal that wished to be other than capitalist. Second, there was broad agreement that engagement with financing institutions (even credit unions), which would be necessary to purchase the building, was only further proof that building ownership was solidly a “capitalist endeavor”. Broadly speaking then, there was general agreement that the social relations underpinning capitalist property ownership were inevitable and inescapable.

Yet among such hopeless and politically vexed declarations, there were what we can call counter discourses. While *property* was taken as “thoroughly capitalist”, the operations within the building were seen as more available to being “outside” those relations. The primary example of this concerned rent. This counter discourse

acknowledged that how rental amounts were set among various member groups occupying space in the building was up for discussion and negotiation. Obviously, the financiers would have to be paid (figured as “outside engagement with capitalism”) but internally, how that money was collected (i.e. how much each group contributed to rent) was available for members to determine and agree on. In this way, rent was not (*as*) determined by capitalism in the same manner as property ownership<sup>43</sup>.

Much of the postcapitalist politics literature would lead us to question many of the assumptions held by members of the E-PAZ with regard to property. This literature fundamentally rejects the notion that “rent”, “innovation”, “markets” and the like are exclusive to and the products of capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2006; Blake 2010). I want to be clear that my interest is not the fact that (most) members of the E-PAZ were without a theory that would help them reconcile their actions with their theory of economy, even though the absence of a non-capitalocentric way of thinking property was a problem throughout the development of the E-PAZ Cooperative. This contextual piece is important because it created the sense that the project was moot since owning the property could only be an instance of becoming capitalist. The negative portrayal or self-understanding that (most) members of the E-PAZ had of the project meant that members were in the position of doing a large amount of unpaid practical work weighed down by feelings of betraying their politics. For my purpose, this is an example of how ideas about economy and capitalism have profound effects within alternative economies, and why a project of articulating a discourse of community economies matter. Similarly, as I’ll argue below, many ideas for “thinking rent” emerged, but debate raged as to whether these really were “other ways” of thinking rent, or if the “correct” (and therefore, only)

way of thinking rent were the tried and true methods used by (capitalist) property developers, real estate agents and so on. My argument in the sections below aim to illustrate two things: first, capitalocentric discourse is powerful (which should come as no surprise) and can be difficult to deconstruct – even for those well-versed in alternative economic practices. Second, because capitalocentric discourse is “strong”, postcapitalists and postcapitalist thought would do well to examine how it is that such “strength” is accomplished. My elaboration of two meetings that centered on rent later in the chapter will offer an example of how such strength is achieved.

### **Messy views on rent and property**

Even if members of the E-PAZ did not have what could be called an elaborated theory for thinking rent and thinking rent otherwise, this is not to say that they did not have any ideas or thoughts about rent or property either. The same could be said about academic writing about rent and property: certainly, there is little work produced by those writing in the postcapitalist literature that has explored how rent or property might be thought in a postcapitalist vein (although see Chapter 5 in Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2013). That said, previous work on rent or property can be read to suggest some lines of postcapitalist thinking about the subject. First, there is the suggestion from Agarwal who reminds that property is an economic resource whose use is not exclusive to the title-holder but, instead, can be appropriated by tenants, sub-tenants and squatters (Agarwal 1994). I do not take legal ownership to be the only avenue in which property can be used as an economic resource, nor the only avenue through which claims of ownership can be made. Collective property, like that supposed in cooperative housing, includes both collective ownership of property and collective control over that property.

Collective property is advantageous in that, drawing on Agarwal again, “property advantage stems not only from ownership, but also from effective control over it” (1994, 1458).

Agarwal’s reminders withstanding, and acknowledging that most housing cooperatives operate on a not-for-profit basis, does not mean that the way rent is divided among members is all that different from how non-cooperative housing divvy up rent – in the main, employing technologies like market assessments to determine “fair market price”. This means that how collective property owners think about rent remains an open question – it is not “thought” by simply having control over property.

A discussion of property may seem out of place in a chapter about rent. But during the E-PAZ’s attempts to think rent otherwise, the question of property and property ownership was never far away. Member-workers of the E-PAZ Cooperative tended to speak of property and rent together – they did not often analytically separate the two in the ways that academics specializing in these areas might. This meant that the question of property, property ownership and even “otherwise property ownership” emerge in the discussions to be reviewed in this chapter. When they did separate property from rent, the difference between the two was marked by a conceptual understanding that property was a worldly object (conceptually and practically) that they were (more-or-less) powerless to change, while rent concerned the internal world of the building, and because of this, could be altered. In this way, rent was considered a local object that they could, potentially, have some control over; whereas property was a concrete abstraction, tethered to a dubious political-economic system (i.e. “capitalism”).



Members of the E-PAZ community identified and founded their identity against capitalism, an identity whose politics also questioned the legitimacy of private property. When the possibility of owning the building they rented presented itself, the groups recognized that the ability to purchase a building was, for them, a rare opportunity, and one that could be fortuitous if their groups were to remain in the downtown area (an area that was gentrifying). This meant the meaning of property ownership (and the social relations therein) had to be thought in a grounded, rather than abstract, way. Was it possible to own and operate a building that was otherwise to the standard radical critique of ownership? In other words: Could the E-PAZ own a building in a way that was not (capitalist) “theft”?<sup>44</sup> There was an early consensus among tenants that it was not within their power to re-define or create an otherwise notion of property – because, as noted above, the outside world, in which property and capitalist property relations was pre-determined, could not recognize property as a thing in which members of the cooperative could intervene or “take back”. Rent, in contrast, was understood by the cooperative as the internal relations between and among tenants, and offered at least some room with which the Co-op could intervene. That said, throughout the discussions about rent, the collectivization of the building tenants and the purchase, the “fact” that property ownership was thoroughly capitalist in nature was both proclaimed and (oddly enough) troubled, as when participants emphasized how and why cooperatively-owned buildings were different or other to capitalist-owned buildings. When the capitalist essentialism of property ownership was troubled or questioned, members tended to refer to the project of buying the building as “taking it off the market” – suggesting that a kind of escape from capitalist geographies was possible.

As I noted earlier, because of their familiarity with alternative economic experiments, and (despite?) their largely capitalocentric take on property and rent, the desire for otherwise rent was strong within the group, and the otherwise ideas for rent were plentiful. Before turning to how radical and political economy academics have theorized property and rent, consider a list of options, mixed together with a list of concerns, from a discussion on how E-PAZ members might go about determining rents of their soon-to-be cooperatively owned building:

- bulk discount for large spaces
- consider the basis of unity<sup>45</sup>
- formulas are more fair
- meet the bottom line with the fairest means
- don't discriminate between members / non-members
- tenants with more means to advocate [for themselves] shouldn't be favoured
- set up something proportional to current rent levels
- set up something proportional to market value
- we should not assume the market is fair
- fairness is a question related to the capacity to pay rent
- we need our own criteria regarding fairness
- consider the mortgage
- base formula on market plus 4-5 factors that allow for increases / decreases for different members / tenants
- is it legal to offer discounts?
- can set up a system of applying for discounts, as at the Y[MCA]?
- how do we plan for inclusion of new members as per their ability to pay / their commitment to shared values?
- are current rates fair / scientific?
- how do we weigh each criterion?

(Minutes, 8 August 2010)

The above list was the result of a two-hour meeting – a meeting in which rent was the main topic of the night. The discussion that night was general. It had to be, as it was the

first formal discussion on rent as a cooperative-in-the-making. How the items on the list relate to each other is not immediately obvious. Instead, they were the starting point of ideas and considerations that came to constitute the decision space. At the time, the E-PAZ Cooperative was in the process of being incorporated. Although they had originally designed their structure around the model of housing cooperatives, the province's cooperative registrar had deemed the E-PAZ a marketing cooperative. What they "market" to each other is commercial space in the downtown area branded by the city as an arts and entertainment hub. This is why the issue of rents was such an important discussion: what the emergent cooperative wanted to do is own a building together, and as such, a major performance of the cooperative was to determine the rent that each of its tenants pay, including how that amount would be calculated.

Perhaps the list seems too all over the place, unwieldy even. Mingled among possibilities for approaching rental rates, were legal questions, organizational questions, as well as ideological statements. There was a practicality that animated some of the items, such as the statement that "we [should] meet the bottom line with the fairest means". What member-representatives were struggling with was both the nature of the "bottom line" and the meaning of "fair". The meaning of the bottom line was only a tad easier than some of the other questions to answer: the bottom line was how much the property, if they owned it, would cost per month, and if the current tenants (technically, at the time of the meeting, prospective cooperative members) could meet those financial obligations. Rent, however, or how much each tenant should pay for their respective space was to be determined by the "fairest means". Pointedly, the prospective members were contending (or "wondering aloud") if or how they could think about "fairest means"

beyond the normative economic parsing in which rent levels were usually calculated – most commonly, by the square foot and sometimes with reference to “market rates” determined by comparisons between the subject property (i.e. the E-PAZ building) and properties deemed similar in type that are adjacent or nearby.

The E-PAZ Cooperative’s discussion about rent readily mixed-and-matched diverse theories and debates about rent, a fact that can also be seen in a short review of some of the ways that scholars have thought about property and rent<sup>46</sup>. Like the members and participants of the E-PAZ Cooperative, most scholars have deemed the question and analysis of rent as a subject “inside” but separate from property. Clearly, there is a relationship between the two, but most scholarship is concerned with rent *or* property – which is why separate analytical concerns have developed around both. Dominant academic considerations of property, to borrow a phrase from Nicholas Blomley, are primarily about the “profit-driven property machine” (2002, 575), which fuels gentrification, underwrites urban land development, and is the foundation of the everyday commercial property market. This should signal that the majority of considerations of property are concerned predominately with capitalist property markets. Cooperative, squatter or other-kinds of property are not largely in the purview of scholarly concern when examining property and practices of property-ownership.

When we turn to the question of rent, scholarly consensus on the object seems to disappear. Cited as a key category in Marxist discussions of urban political economy, rent is nonetheless a murky and trouble-making concept (Katz 1986). (Meaning mainstream political economy has had difficulties of thinking rent too!) Although neoclassical, institutionalist and Marxist views of land and property have often been at odds (Halia

1988), no one perspective has been able to reconcile their theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence (Haila 1988). A big – if not impossible – stumbling block in squaring empirical evidence with theoretical perspectives is that qualitative research suggests that the reasons underlying property acquisition as well as the ways that property owners manage their properties are diverse. Indeed, empirical research suggests a diversity of reasons why landowners own property, and further, that the reasons for property ownership cannot be reduced to profit-making alone (Denman and Prodano 1972; Blomley 2004). Massey and Catalano (1978, cited in Haila 1988) even suggest there are a plethora of landlord types, all of whom have different interests. They conclude that the social relations which exist between owner and renter vary greatly. Nor does property ownership necessitate a particular use or relation to the territory “owned” – renters and property owners alike may have more porous understandings of the boundaries property enact (Blomley 2004). These studies suggest treating land as a mere financial asset is inadequate and empirically false. This leads Haila to suggest that much of literature on land and property that draws on (an orthodox reading of) Marxist political economy tends to do so “from a single point of view” in the sense that it focuses “on real estate investment as a case of profit-seeking” (345). Unfortunately – at least from the perspective of postcapitalism – such studies do not attempt to employ (a non-essentialist) Marxist conceptual terms: Marxist categories are found simply wanting in the face of empirical evidence<sup>47</sup>.

Yet it would be wrong to assume that political economy is therefore moot. Contemporary interest in rent emerged with new force in Marxist geography during the late 1970s, 1980s and 90s. This followed David Harvey’s work, which sought to enhance

Marx's analytics to take account of the ways that capitalism fundamentally shaped space and place (1982). Whereas Marx had originally assigned matters of rent and property as adjunct to, if not outside of, capitalist relations – because property owners and therefore the people who made money off of rent were not capitalists (i.e. those who built and ran factories) – the new Marxist theory of rent postulated that rent played a functional role in capitalism as “an organic and endogenous ingredient of the capitalist system” (Haila 1988, 79). Rent was afforded a coordinative role in capitalism insofar as it was argued that investment in real estate temporarily provided a fix for capital when investment in the industrial sector was unwise. This was Harvey's argument in a nutshell: he famously postulated that investment in land and real estate (“the secondary circuit”) happens when there are no adequate investment opportunities in the industrial (primary) sector. His theory placed emphasis on urban development or change – such as deindustrialization – and investment capital switching (summarized by Haila 1988). Others, like Henri Lefebvre (1968 / 1996), although Marxist in orientation, tended, in contrast, to emphasize “intrinsic” differences between land and real estate investment from industrial investment.

David Harvey's work admits the diversity cited above exists, yet calls attention to an “increasing tendency to treat the land as a pure financial asset” (Harvey 1982, 348, cited in Haila 1988, 83). In his conception, treating land (and with it, buildings) as a “pure financial asset” was especially pertinent to the capitalization of land markets. Harvey's analysis was able to call attention to the ways “the restructuring and globalization of economies and especially the concomitant changes in the financial system have had enormous effects on real estate markets” (Haila 1988, 79). It is in this

sense that (capitalist) property markets matter and have real effects on the ground. Much of Harvey's insights were very much in line with urban geographers' focus on the spatial transformations that have occurred in cities over the past thirty years, which have seen rapid increase in land and housing prices, and of course, the squeeze on lower income tenants, including commercial ones (Zukin 2010), as the gentrification literature attests. Thus, drawing on and citing David Harvey, Steven Katz summarized that new theories of rent drew attention to how real estate became the "basis for various forms of social control over the spatial organization and development of capitalism" (Harvey, 337, cited in Katz at 67). In the main, such work highlights the ways that land (and the buildings on it) become commodities to be bought, sold and indeed leased in the marketplace. "Rent" is thereby understood as "the kernel of land market formation" (Katz 1986, 67), which in turn shapes space "in ways reflective of competition and amenable to accumulation" (Harvey, 333, cited in Katz).

Such an analytic is certainly in line with the starting analysis of many of the E-PAZ Co-op members, who often spoke of the project to buy the building as "taking it off the market". Included under the aegis of this one-liner analysis was the recognition that even if they were to be successful in buying the building, this act alone would not take them "out of capitalism" since the financing of the mortgage and other expenses, such the property taxes the group would be liable for, were at the mercy of the financial system and was calculated on the basis of the property market. Like mainstream political economy, this analysis was less concerned with individual capitalists than with capitalism (or "capital as a whole")<sup>48</sup>. But being, ultimately, unable to "escape" capitalism meant that exploring how owning property together could be a viable site for the development

within this community of a discourse of community economy – viable in the sense of “radical” or having radical potentiality rather than being sound financially – was largely curtailed. So there existed “otherwise ideas” and examples of other ways of “doing rent” along with the usual ways of doing rent, but all were mere “pebbles on a beach”. People could see and name the “pebbles” – rent geared to income, rent discounts based on meeting criteria of shared values or practices, and so on – but they had no beach<sup>49</sup>.

The literature highlighting the diverse reasons why owners hold and manage property is also relevant (Denman and Prodano 1972; Massey and Catalano 1978; Blomley 2004). Neither the original title owner, nor the tenants forming the Cooperative, approached the building as a pure financial asset whose value is accorded by the amount of profit that could be gained from future rents or from a future sale<sup>50</sup>. Indeed, in its incorporation the co-op adopted a distinctly anti-profit structure which, incidentally, was why the formation of the cooperative took five months. This was accomplished in two ways. The first shut out the possibility that any individual member now or in the future could seek a profit-motive either through dissolving the Cooperative or selling their equity share of the Cooperative to another<sup>51</sup>. Second, the structure of the Co-op shut out the possibility that (outside) investors could come to have a stake in the building. This was achieved originally by setting any return on investment shares at 0%, and much later (when the 0% return on investment shares were deemed unattractive to much-needed investors) ensuring that no investor would be granted decision-making power within the Cooperative<sup>52</sup>. These structural conditions were enshrined in the Co-op’s incorporation, and fulfilled what members meant by “taking the building off the property market”<sup>53</sup>. In these ways, the incorporation of the E-PAZ Cooperative responded to member concerns



about the “capitalist property market”. It enshrined what members described as “anti-profit-motives”. Yet such decisions did not assuage concerns about becoming (capitalist) property owners: as noted above, there was simply no ground for any other theory of economy to take root. Nor, of course, did these particular decisions address the question of rents. This is why a discourse of community economy is warranted.

Much of what I described above points to E-PAZ members’ theories and analyses of capitalism and property. In a general sense, I suggest capitalocentrism “got in the way” of developing a coherent framework about their space vis-à-vis the economy that didn’t depend on hidden narratives of anti-capitalist heroism (“surviving in the cracks of capitalism”). Members had ideas about property and rent which largely suggested there was no “outside” to capitalism, but how did those ideas meet up with the practices already within the space? To understand the difficulties of thinking otherwise within the complex and prior economic geographies of the E-PAZ, the next section provides further background to the E-PAZ’s political history and geography, and draws on Gibson-Graham’s work to theorize the group as a community economy.

### **Rent in the decision-space of the E-PAZ Cooperative**

One of the imaginative ideals behind the original manifestation of Winnipeg’s Permanent Autonomous Zone was that the businesses could potentially fund, or at the very least subsidize, social and political organizations (second-hand personal communication). This is not to guess the founder(s) were under any illusion this could happen right away – only that it was a part of the dreamscape of the E-PAZ’s original architects. This ideal never came to fruition, although over the years, new tenant-organizations were gifted rent for periods of time as a way of allowing them to “get on

their feet”. In this way, the E-PAZ was very much an incubator space; the title owner regularly appropriated the economic resource that is property to allow others to grow alternative economic projects or political organizations.

Yet the power to determine rents in the original E-PAZ was not unlike that of the imagined model capitalist property owner in so far as he, as the owner of building title, had the sole discretionary power to make decisions as to who would pay what in rent. That it may have been the case that the decisions around rates were made in conversation, say, between the owner and in-moving tenants, or even among the owner, his home worker cooperative (which rented space within the building), and in-moving tenants, does not moot this point. As the title holder, the owner was not under any obligation to engage in “co-produced” rental rates<sup>54</sup>. The newly enshrined Co-op could do the same, of course, but first they had to choose to do so. This leads to a second point: the formation of the E-PAZ as a cooperative by the tenants changed the dynamic relationship between owner and tenant in an important and significant way because the basis of the cooperative meant that current tenants could become part of a collective of owners of the building. This very fact was why prospective members of the E-PAZ were having extended discussions about what rent levels should be, might have to be, and how rent rates might be divided – well before they were actually in a position to purchase the building.

The existing rental rates also played a role in the E-PAZ’s rent discussions because they varied greatly and of course were set by the current owner at his discretion. As such, they reflected his values. Table 1 shows these rates and the square footage of each organization (excluding common areas). The worker cooperative of which the title holder was a founding member was a beneficiary in terms of the rate per square foot: their rent,

compared to that of other tenants in the building, was lower than most tenants, as were the organizations he was directly involved in (I've marked these on the table as "owner-involved"), with the exception of the basement space, a small collectively run library, and a radical political organization<sup>55</sup>. As discussed, there was a historical logic behind what E-PAZ participants came to call such a "discount": a lower rental cost for a business like the owner's home worker cooperative was meant to allow the business to get off the ground and grow. But if this was the reasoning at the building's inception in the mid-1990s, it seemed that, along the way, the vast difference in rate paid by the building's flagship tenant (the owner's home cooperative) and the rest of the tenants remained. The dream that this worker co-op could subsidize other tenant spaces never came to fruition. Current rental rates also showed that the political organizations were more likely to be given a "below market" rate – particularly, it seems, those organizations in which the original owner was a member or politically supported. For the most part, these were organizations that were radically left (i.e. their political orientation was anarchist). In contrast, other organizations, such as a leftist magazine, paid rents slightly above the suggested market rates.

The third contextual piece of the rent discussions was that in the more than a decade-and-a half-of-existence, the financial viability of the building was always precarious. For example, the original owner of the E-PAZ had not been able (or, perhaps, was not willing) to pay down much of the original mortgage. But perhaps more importantly, the owner had never seemed to cover the operational costs of upkeep for a commercial building: a reserve fund for major structural repairs, for instance, was never put in place. These issues were described by the Co-op as "structural hurdles" and were

often highlighted in the Co-op's discussions about rent as important for the financial viability of purchasing the building. Sometimes, this was just a matter of naming the difficulty of staying on top of building maintenance: from upgrading the fire escapes to repairing the front entrance. At other times, it was discussed that building maintenance was not simply a matter of repairs, but one in which the state can (and has) been able to intervene since the failure to maintain the physical space of the building had meant the building upon purchase would not be up to building code and had a variety of by-law infringements against it<sup>56</sup>.

What the above description should highlight is that discussions about rent were happening in the context of larger questions and considerations: how viable was it to buy the building? Clearly, the current financial structure was not sustainable to allow for the growth of reserve funds for capital repairs, for instance. Nor were the current finances enough to cover increasing municipal taxes on the property, meaning the group had to contend with the fact that the “revitalization” of the downtown area in which the building was situated would mean increases to property taxes in the years ahead. As it was, during its first decade as the E-PAZ, regular fundraisers had been needed to pay for the property tax – a fact that created tension among this community, especially as some resident anarchists were expressively against paying taxes. This meant that there was a broadly construed acknowledgement that “inherited rental rates” were not such that the full costs of the building were adequately covered. And a project to buy the building was not financially viable without a more thorough financial plan in place. This then forms the backdrop to the Cooperative's decision space on rent: if the Cooperative was to buy the

building, prospective members were aware that the purchase would require that rents rise accordingly.

Yet even though it was known that rents would have to rise in order for the Cooperative to go forward with purchase, for a long time, just how much rents would need to be raised was not known with absolute certainty at the time of the rent discussions I'm about to describe. The full cost could not be finalized until financing was in place; only approximate numbers could be used<sup>57</sup>. The cart was not quite before the horse in this instance. Instead these discussions were part-and-parcel of the Co-op's formation when priority was given to how the members would work together and what type of institutional co-op would fit with the activities and relations between members<sup>58</sup>.

In retrospect, it may have been fortuitous for members to find and to examine the financial feasibility and especially to make some effort at estimating the rental increases earlier in the process. That is because, in lieu of cost estimates, talk and fear about "raising rents" circulated throughout the building, understandably causing worry and tension between prospective members and, in some instances, causing individual groups to panic. The result was that "raising rents" came to be a boogeyman entity in itself. "Raising rents" – the mere phrase! – was a kind of vortex: the speller of doom for any discussion aimed at considering the different options available to Co-op members as they sought to decide on how they might divide up the costs of owning and running the building. There were moments when "raising rents" was the go-to phrase that could bracket and even close down possibilities for re-imagining rents in this autonomous zone. Examples of this will be seen later in the chapter.

“Raising rents” generated panic, called forth economic uncertainty and impending doom. This will become an important aspect of the discussion that follows. It is hard to be imaginative and curious about otherwise thinking when in a state of panic. Such a fear-mongering, panic-attack-inducing entity was enacted through hyperbolic truth statements, such as a comment that rents were going to be “raised 200%” across the board (observation notes from E-PAZ meeting, 4 September 2010). The percentage increase in rents for some members was extraordinary – for one tenant, if the market rate was used, they would have seen a 300% increase. A problem emerged, as I describe below, when the panic surrounding how much rents would need to increase was used to demand that *curiosity* about other ways of dividing up rent should be excised. In other words, people advocating methods that rejected “scientific” and capitalistic / market-based ways of determining rent levels, or rejected the idea that “fair rent” could be easily achieved by applying the same principles to each space were deemed (by some) fools and “(stupid) idealists without a grip on reality”<sup>59</sup>. The examples I tell below might leave the reader with the sense that talk of the fear of raising rents was used exclusively by the name callers. This was not the case. Instead, all were privy to talk and fear about raising rents, which is perhaps why emotions at meetings often ran high, and one of the reasons why fear was able to haunt our discussions in profound ways. The fear surrounding rent increases might not have been avoidable, especially given that rent is a major expense for all tenants in the building, and, as already noted, rents were indeed slated to rise for some (in the end, for about half of the tenants). In my account of the meetings below, I aim to elaborate further on how it was that the fear of raising rents, among other things we might

properly identify as capitalocentric, negatively affected how we might imagine rent otherwise.

I turn now to an account of two separate meetings – both which were aimed at thinking rent in the E-PAZ. Whereas the first meeting generated possible methods of dividing rent among tenants and generated questions about how members of the E-PAZ might link the financial matter of rental rates with the group’s values, this task was largely derailed during the second meeting. My account draws on my notes and the official minutes from two E-PAZ Cooperative meetings in particular. Some of the discussions were quite heated, and at times, violently so. As a participant, I was directly involved in the decision space, so I was a part of the “heat”, as will be seen.

Prior to the meetings, one cooperative member (I refer to him below as *D*) had taken it upon himself to construct a series of sophisticated spreadsheets<sup>60</sup>. These took into account current operating statements (income and expenses), our estimated down payment of \$50,000, projected interest rates, as well as current rents<sup>61</sup>. In the account I construct below, I draw on his work, and, where it existed, on correspondence about rents that likewise was conducted across the E-PAZ listserv. Also at the group’s disposal was a building appraisal produced by a consulting firm, which included two sets of market rate assessments of all spaces within the building<sup>62</sup>. The market rate assessments – particularly the suggested market rate value ascribed to all floors (see Table 1) were to loom large in the second discussion, and I will argue, they came to be used *and* thought in ways that seriously limited, perhaps foreclosed, some efforts to think otherwise about rent. How that happened is a big part of the story I want to tell.

### *First discussion*

The first formal discussion on rents was marked by the statement “the market is not fair”. The imperative then became determining what constitutes fair. It is perhaps important to note that this statement did not come at the beginning of our discussion. Instead, it was made while we were collectively listing criteria we might use for determining rents (see the list reproduced in the section above). Yet, while not the founding statement for our discussion, I would argue that it marked a moment where we found our footing.

Let me back up a bit to explain: at the beginning of the rent discussion we asked, “what are our principles going to be?” And, “what are the variables?” Pertinent variables included the length and term of our mortgage. *D* outlined what he said were three ways of making up rent: 1) market rates; 2) based on space; and, 3) based on income (of the tenant organizations). But while these three approaches are generally recognized, other approaches likewise appeared: 4) based on value of space; and, 5) based on whether the tenant was a business or an organization (Notes). Although a lengthy list already, each item and indeed the list as a whole brought still other questions to the fore: a) are we going to treat tenant members and “mere” tenants differently when it comes to rental rates?; b) how does our method of determining rent relate to the basis of unity, that is, “what the space [building] is about?”; and, c) how are we going to go about discussing proposed rates with individual tenants?<sup>63</sup> (Notes).

While no formal decisions were made, a few interim decisions guided the remainder of our discussion, marking out the coordinates of our decision space. First, was the suggestion that members should not enjoy a “discount” vis-à-vis non-member tenants.



*D* said that “the benefits of membership are that members get to make decisions about the building, not that they get cheaper rents”. There seemed to be agreement on this – indeed, a relationship between members and non-member tenants that exploited the latter was seen as undesirable and marked as unethical. How we should spell out our method of determining rent as it might relate to our basis of unity, that is, an articulated description of the E-PAZ’s values in its new form as a cooperative, was a much more difficult question to address<sup>64</sup>. For one, a word that often made people uncomfortable and uneasy reared its head: “politics”. Some at the meeting disavowed politics – it was something they thought we should avoid. At first, I wasn’t quite sure what this meant until someone said that they “don’t want a petty discussion about what the building is about”; that is, who should be valued within it<sup>65</sup>. In place of *who* (read: which groups) might be valued, the question “how do we value our space?” was put forward as a more appropriate question<sup>66</sup>. I will return to this question shortly.

In contrast to the awkward, refused, and seemingly impossible topic of “politics”, the third concern – how we might go about discussing possible rates with tenants (i.e. a discussion of methodology) – was decided in a manner of minutes as the most pressing topic to address. However, this was an “unofficial” decision, meaning there was no motion or formal agreement recorded in the minutes that stated that there was consensus in the group that a decision around methodology was required; tacitly, the group assembled did not believe that how rental rates were established could simply (read: naturally) rely on existing (capitalist) methods. Some suggested that having discussions about rent and possible rent rates with tenants was in order. It was also suggested that undertaking internal research was needed. This could allow the Cooperative to consider

each tenant's current and future capacity to pay rent. Such research was deemed important to the group because we were concerned about the potential for organizations to get "shut out" of tenancy due to the need to raise rents. This brought up questions such as: "Should there be a percentage of the building that is explicitly for non-businesses, i.e. social or political organizations?" And, "How could we guarantee this?" Our discussion thus led to questions that could not be answered by decisions about rents alone. For example, out of our discussion we flagged an issue that participants felt should be discussed at length when it came time to write the Cooperative's by-laws: how is the Cooperative going to remain practically committed to incubating and helping sustain access to commercial space for social and political organizations?

In sum, the opening discussion on rent was wide-ranging. We identified both precise and broad issues. Our concerns drew on past and present circumstances of the E-PAZ, and looked toward the future as well. Yet, while much of the discussion opened a Pandora's Box of sorts, our minutes speak to a more clearly defined set of parameters that we thought we could consider. This is the list of "suggestions and concerns" quoted earlier. The list included ways the "world" and some organizations within it (like the YMCA) determine "fair" price that was at odds with or, at the very least, contravened so-called "normal" practices, as in the assessment of the property, where "market rent" was determined by comparisons with similar spaces and presented as a per-square-foot figure. The meeting thus determined, albeit in outline, a variety of possible ways we might go about determining rent and fairness among tenants.

## *Second discussion*

The meeting minutes from the next meeting also included an elaborate list of what the minute-taker called “discussion about differing possibilities” (24 August 2010). The account of the discussion in the minutes included the following:

- Discussion comparing organizations and trying to do complex weighing may be a very hard thing.
- Discussion that discussion of principles is important even if it’s complex and potentially contentious.
- Discussion about difficulties with respect to turnover: Do we need to dynamically adjust the rents for the whole building to be fair, based on variable criteria for potential new tenants?
- Discussion that for some organizations rent increases will have to be gradual to allow time for planning and adjusting.
- Statement that a purely square foot based approach will generally not penalize the voluntary orgs because they’re already in very small spaces. (24 August 2010)

Many of the same options were presented in the meeting’s minutes as were reported in the meeting previous, but the character of the discussion was very different, only some of which is lost in the transcription of the meeting. I start with the minutes because it can be noted that unlike those from the first meeting (which, recall, included a wide range of options), this list is notable for how strongly it speaks to the impossibilities of the task at hand. Determining rent is narrated as hard, complex, and contentious. As a written record of events, the minutes tell one version of what happened that night – in the main, the meeting’s outcomes. Below, I tell a narrative of the meeting as a way of teasing out the arrival of these “can’ts”. Examining this process will show the play and power of capitalocentric discourse.

Who came to E-PAZ meetings was rather fluid. Certainly there were regulars, and some of the changes in who attended the meeting was the result of an organization changing their “rep”. The minutes record ten people at the meeting, although this number

would fall to six by meeting's end (Minutes, 24 August 2010; personal memory)<sup>67</sup>. At this particular meeting, there were two new faces. The first, an older man, was a well-known, and I'm told, highly respected "elder" in the leftist community. He hailed from a tenant organization that up to this point in the incorporation and start-up of the Cooperative had not expressed any interest in being involved as a member of the Co-op<sup>68</sup>. The second new person was a young man from one of the worker cooperatives, a cooperative that had been active since the start, if often a divisive member. Both new faces indicated at the beginning of the meeting that they were present because the discussion was about rents. Yet, because of who he was (an elder), or perhaps because of how he was (the word "gruff" would apply), the older of the two new faces would to come to direct, indeed dominate, the night's decision space.

Meetings usually began by a quick "check-in", followed by a review of the agenda prepared by the facilitator, and a review of the status of "action items" that had been tasked to reps or member groups before getting to the agenda items. From the start of the meeting, the elder dominated the discussion, making attempts to railroad the facilitator and, throughout the meeting, referred to our attempts to describe our otherwise ideas as "out of step with reality". I want to look in detail at what and how some of our ideas were branded outlandish, and how such an attack was discursively performed.

In order to appease the elder (who stated he did not stay for the whole meeting), the discussion on rent was moved up on the agenda (from item 9 on the agenda to the first item)("Agenda Aug 24", listserv, sent 23 Aug 2010). Although he had clearly heard that we were discussing rent at this particular meeting, he had not read the minutes from our previous discussion<sup>69</sup>. A copy was found for him to review. Additionally – although he

was not alone in this – prior to the meeting he had not seen the numbers provided by the market assessment or those presented in *D*’s spreadsheets.

Wanting to give the new faces a general description of the previous meeting, member-workers who had been present gave a rundown of the discussion. Piping up, I suggested we had arrived at “some consensus” and itemized a list of “possible approaches”. I stated that I thought we had decided, if not officially, that our task was to come up with approaches to rent that were, as defined by us, “socially acceptable”. I stated we broadly agreed the market could not provide such an end (recall our conclusion “the market was not fair”). With others helping to fill in the story, I said we wanted to think about how we could divide up rents that would meet criteria set up by us as “fair”: attuned, I said, to “the social”. Someone then gave the elder an example of what “the social” might be, for example “discounted rates to volunteer-run organizations”. To such a summary, the elder snorted disapproval. He then unleashed a fit of anger: “Every organization here uses volunteer labour!” he yelled<sup>70</sup>.

The example of discounts for volunteer organizations was quite unfortunate: in our previous discussion, we had noted the “fact of volunteer labour” throughout the building, and subsequent in that discussion provided more-finely graduated distinctions. For instance, we noted that those occupying paid positions at one organization (the elder’s) made a living (or, more-than-living) wage, and that their wage circumstances were different from the members of the worker co-ops, most of whom made minimum wage. Even further, we had noted that if “volunteer labour” was not quite a determining characteristic, then perhaps something more akin to the revenue generated by individual organizations would be fitting. Granted these discussions were awkwardly translated into

the minutes of the first meeting, and poorly reviewed at the beginning of the second<sup>71</sup>. We had determined that such an approach (“a discount for volunteer organizations”) – even the development of such an approach – would take considerable effort. Moreover, our intention of discussing these as general possibilities was to figure out which methodologies we should develop, because any such development would require elaboration and time. So, quite by accident (perhaps one of the perils of re-constituting our decision space each time we met), much of the nuance developed during our first meeting was lost in its translation into meeting minutes and in its transcription into a quick review at the start of the second.

What made the elder angry<sup>72</sup> was that we had set our purpose not on figuring out the actual numbers of what each tenant could be charged, but that we sought to determine the principles or philosophy of how we would go about constructing those numbers<sup>73</sup>. This seemed to make the elder angry for reasons I can only imagine based on the rest of the meeting (detailed below<sup>74</sup>). I suspect he expressed anger because any “mixed-method” would either not be scientific or because fairness stemmed from “treating everyone the same” (what could be called a technical equality). I’ll illustrate this as I fill out the story of the meeting.

Much was lost in the elder’s fit of anger and its aftermath. For one thing, others also became angry and frustrated: with the process and with the purpose of the discussion; as well as with the way the elder was (attempting to) commandeer the meeting. In terms of political emotions, fear was also fired up. Different participants put it in different ways: some were fearful of the general unknown (“How might we decide and divide rents?”); others were more “concretely fearful” about how raising rents would affect their home

organization; others were more “cooperatively fearful”, wondering aloud how raising rents would price tenants out of the building. What happened next is difficult to describe but is important for one of the arguments I pursue.

Although political emotions were running high after the elder’s outburst, his anger was directed largely at me<sup>75</sup>. I was, it seemed, the speaker of “the social” and the supposed advocate of a particular approach to rents (“discounts for volunteer organizations”), both of which he deemed “stupid” and “fantastical”. No amount of trying to clarify or indeed protest that such a reading was not what I had said seemed to make any difference. A few others tried, but failed, to clarify this point, something I will attend to more fully below. From that point on, anytime I spoke or tried to further another’s point, the elder would gruffly adjust himself in his seat or scoff. There was even an instance where I made a suggestion, only for him to roll his eyes! In another instance, a suggestion I made was verbally rejected by the elder, only to be acknowledged by him as a contribution to the discussion when immediately after I spoke a (male) member made the same suggestion. Such treatment, which was shocking on many levels, was also confounding, and (obviously) incredibly gendered and sexist. It was as if the fact that I was a woman and the speaker of “the social” that I had nothing of worth to say (and so, should perhaps not speak at all<sup>76</sup>). As the meeting continued, I became a thing: “woman” and “the speaker of the social”. That is, “I” morphed into a thing I’ll call the woman-social, an entity or object that dare not or best not speak. Everything this object (“me”) did in the meeting was rejected; as the literal embodiment of “the social”, what I had to say was rejected (in a variety of ways) as beyond the pale.

The elder's response to what I had to say was clearly, if covertly, sexist; and just as clear was that "the social" for him was a thing of scorn. I was not totally alone in this treatment. From the moment he entered the room, the elder insisted on ignoring and speaking over the meeting's facilitator (the only other woman in the room). She, like me, was "put in her place" by the elder in the ways he addressed (but moreover ignored) us. The key difference was that because the facilitator role has a specific purpose in consensus-based decision-making, the other participants at the meeting were able to insist (mildly, in my opinion) that she be listened to, and they actively gave deference to her facilitation. The difference between her and me then became my (bodily) association with "the social". Let me explore this further by describing some of the private and public events of the meeting. This is important for the larger argument that I wish to make in this section.

First, I should say that from the moment of the elder's outburst, the meeting was personally horrible<sup>77</sup>. This would be acknowledged at the end of the meeting (well after the elder had left) by the facilitator and by (male) participants at the meeting. Privately, the meeting was vexing to me in a couple of ways. Covert sexism is not new to me, but unlike overt sexism (which can be laughed at, mocked or verbally and directly rejected), as many a feminist before me has noted, covert forms of sexism are difficult to grapple with. I've never found a good or adequate response. I think what's hard about it is not so much that I'm internally wondering whether or not I'm "imagining things" as much as I'm wondering if I am crazy for thinking that something (covert sexism) is going on but left wondering why, if it is, no one is reacting to it<sup>78</sup>. There is uncertainty around covert



instances of sexism, even if or when the minute acts of gendered violence seem clear and indisputable<sup>79</sup>.

More important than being “put in my place” by one individual, as the meeting progressed, it was not just the elder that “made me” into the target “speaker of the social”. For example, after the elder left, two of my male colleagues made note of “the social” (that is, any concern about the social relations raised in the first meeting) by gesturing towards me – literally thumbing towards me<sup>80</sup>. This may not seem extraordinary. But from my perspective (and now, as I argue), the fact that two of my colleagues could “thumb” towards me as a way of naming “the social” is telling. (They made this gesture long after I had given up speaking and near the end of the two-and-a-half hour meeting.) What’s important is not the question of whether these gestures were made to silence (in contrast to, say, the elder’s eye roll and rude remarks). I do not think they were intended as such. But what is notable about them is that the gestures were an acknowledgment of “woman-social”, that is, the conflation of a concern for “the social” to a particular, gendered, body (which happened to be mine). That is, their gesture acknowledged that I had become the embodiment of contention<sup>81</sup>, the (apparently) “lone speaker” of the social.

All of the above, as a generous reader might imagine, makes writing about this meeting incredibly difficult. Feeling like I had become a target – the lone “speaker of the social”, “woman-social” – was not fun. But whereas at the moment of the elder’s outburst I felt that my words were misconstrued – furnished with content they did not contain – as the meeting progressed, the context changed. I’m arguing that the difficulty was not just that I had been silenced, but that I became an entity-thing (“woman-social”). It is this

“thing” (a thing that is not “me”) that I wish to examine here. Although difficult to account, in looking back at this meeting, analyzing the gendered violence at work during the meeting is vitally important in a successful discursive performance that worked to close down the possibility of thinking otherwise.

The woman, literally, and the social, figuratively, was silenced in the course of the meeting. “Otherwise possibilities”, speculative and curious options for determining rent were largely ousted for more “appropriately gendered ones”: hard numbers and scientific methods. “Hard numbers and scientific methods” were found in the spreadsheets prepared by *D* but people were especially transfixed with the market rates found in the property assessment of the building. Gibson-Graham analysis that how “the economy” is discursively rendered as a masculinized object of knowledge, suggesting dominance, demanding ‘scientific’ rationality, and “the author of its own causation” (p. 103) is instructive. They suggest that affinity discursively rendered between Man and Economy highlights just a few of the ways that economic “talk” and thinking are powerfully gendered<sup>82</sup>. Although they are not the first to do so (see Nash 1995), in the course of their larger analysis they suggest the “affective discourse of economy is always to some extent a discourse of mastery: the terrain of the economy is laid out by economic theory .... Spreading the economy before him as his dominion, economic theory constructs Man as a sovereign/ruler” (1996, 104-5). Their analysis suggests the gendered violence described above is not unusual when we view “otherwise” ideas within a larger cultural context.

In place of other options for thinking rent, what I’ll call “manly rents” were advocated. These were rent levels determined by “the market”. The fury unleashed by mention of the social was not simply aimed at shutting down some avenues for thinking

rent. Instead, it was aimed at confirming that there was only one avenue: those numbers and methods contained in the market-rate assessment. Fear was an expression of economic uncertainty and vulnerability (itself a gendered position), for which a solid and “reality-based” intervention was called for. For these reasons, I want to take a closer look at how it was that the “market-rate assessments” were taken up as the reasonable truth, rather than (as we had determined at our previous meeting), the outcome of capitalist relations.

The uptake of the market-rate “manly rents” turned on the two discursive performances discussed in this section: the use of gendered violence and the fear feeding a desire for economic certainty. Together, both performances became formidable blockages to imagining how rents could or might be otherwise. Although they can be considered separate issues, what also can be considered is how they work and strengthen each other: the gendered violence effectively sidelined possible worlds of thinking otherwise rent, and the fear stemming from economic uncertainty fueled the desire for certainty which, purportedly, could be found in rational (read: masculine) numbers that were the basis of confirming a very conventional way of thinking rent. “Masculine”<sup>83</sup> numbers were touted as simple, straightforward, and non-subjective: they “simply” were a mathematical calculation related to square footage and comparative properties, known as market rent. Below, I’m concerned to draw out how both moments were based on and (re)affirmed the supposed capitalocentric “fairness” and scientific advantage of market-rate assessments.

After the (woman-)social was rejected from the meeting, the market assessment of the building, a two-hundred page bound document commissioned by the E-PAZ and

prepared by a independent property assessment firm, came to predominate. That assessment was the market assessment by the numbers. Statements regarding the “truth” of the numbers were many. Claims were made, for instance, that the numbers should be taken as the most fair, the most non-confrontational, the most scientific. At times these items (“most fair”, non-confrontational, and scientific) appeared as separate or stand-alone arguments in support of market-based numbers. At other times, fairness was linked to the scientific rationality of the numbers: for example, because scientific rationality was “non-subjective”, they offered blind justice. Moreover, it was argued that such rationality promised non-confrontation among the cooperative members. Still other times, the market assessment numbers were presented as “the easy route” (which indeed they would be) because there would be nothing to discuss and negotiate about rental rates. Consequently, the promise of rational calculation was appealing, a salve to fear: the market-based numbers promised fairness (in a variety of senses), camaraderie, and timeliness.

As Caitlin Zaloom notes, “since the invention of number-based accounting practices such as double-entry bookkeeping, numbers have been a cornerstone of economic calculation, providing the essential tools for rationalized action” (2006, 61). Drawing on the work of Mary Poovey and others, Zaloom suggests “[market] numbers act to (1) establish expertise and authority, (2) make knowledge impersonal, (3) portray certainty and universality, and (4) contribute to resolving situations of doubt, conflict, and mistrust” (61). It’s funny of course that the market rates stated in the building assessment could have such power because their very production involved “subjective” and qualitative data. That is, one of the ways the market rates are arrived at is through

comparison, undertaken by the assessor, to other buildings (often those in the same area), the spaces within them, and their corresponding rental rates. This means that market assessments are not simply scientific if by “scientific” we mean “the absence of subjective judgment”; market assessments cannot *not* be subjective. What is instead unique about any assessor’s knowledge is the access they have to buildings and their current rental rates; as such, they are able to undertake comparisons between buildings. What is subjective about the production of a market assessment can include industry standards (which define what an assessor should compare), and standard practices (taking photographs of buildings deemed “comparable”). These standards are always interpreted by the assessor themselves, shaped by the practices of the profession. The larger point here is the rather obvious ways we might recognize market assessment numbers as constructed<sup>84</sup>. Importantly, although some of the subjective material is included in the larger report<sup>85</sup>, these sources and real-world references are largely erased in the transcription the assessor makes in producing in the building assessment table of “market rents” – the table that contained what I’ve dubbed “manly rents”, and the table that, as the meeting progressed, was deemed fair, reasonable and “realistic”.

What such numbers promised is an (imagined) world without conjecture, and the smooth “production of systematic knowledge” (Zaloom 2006, 61). When we were scolded (by the elder) for constituting a space in which we could consider social relations that were in line with our ethical evaluations of what we want the world to look like (a prefigurative politic), his citation of “how the world works” was capitalocentric: akin to saying that we are under the capitalist system and powerless to make decisions outside of it.

Although the meeting ended without decisions, and with the aftershocks noted by participants as the “rampant anti-feminism” that took place during the meeting<sup>86</sup>, it was not as if otherwise ideas were fully expelled from the desire of most of the Co-op for something else and other to market rates. What was clear (if unspoken), however, was that even coming up with otherwise methods or philosophies was a big and challenging task. We all could recognize the ease and the promises (of time, technical fairness) of market rate numbers. How could we not?

This is perhaps why long discussions are needed to imagine other possible worlds: If the making and presentations of market assessment numbers can be recognized as constructed, what might be other possible constructions? One such proposal was offered by *D*. His worker cooperative occupies a small, windowless office at the very back of the third floor – an office that can only be accessed through a back stairwell. To say that this office is “undesirable” might be an understatement, although he described it as quite the opposite. Noting that he valued not having a window because it forced him to not substitute a “view” for an actual break from work, *D* called attention to another kind of construction: that we conduct an “internal” assessment<sup>87</sup>. Such a proposal was one where “fairness” was procured via the power to determine “value”, a power that could be negotiated between the individual tenant and the cooperative members as a whole<sup>88</sup>. During the meeting, his proposal was scoffed at by the elder, but in future conversations and the resulting final rents it was, more or less, part of the overall method used to determine rents<sup>89</sup>. The next month would be spent negotiating rents with tenants<sup>90</sup>.

## Conclusion

This chapter is about only one part of the discussions the E-PAZ had about rent, during two meetings in particular. I write about these specific meetings because they illustrate some of the dynamics and tensions that can circulate that concern the possibility thinking otherwise. This chapter illustrates some of the difficulties in thinking otherwise even among a group who seemingly was already thinking otherwise. The chapter shows how capitalocentric thinking remains entrenched, and it illustrated some cultural strategies use to perform that discourse. I focus my discussion of the second meeting on how fear and the desire for certainty, coupled with the use of gender violence could powerfully limit options to one possibility: the so-called “the real economy” (aka “reality”), a performance that could admit no intervention in economy except what already “is” (capitalistic-based market rental rates).

“Thinking economy” is difficult in part because of the naturalized power that instruments like market rates and, of course, its underpinning rationality enjoy. Such instruments are powerful because they promise a form of “fairness”, such as standardization (i.e. treating everyone the same through the use of formulas)<sup>91</sup>. Social and cultural analyses of how the economy is talked about and figured are an important part of this discussion, and illustrated by the example from the second meeting, in which there were limits on who could participate (not the woman-social!). In addition, as seen there, “the economy” in a capitalocentric discourse was a gendered object of knowledge. This too affected what was possible in a profoundly gendered way.

The “truth” seemingly contained within the “quick fix” of relying on the market rate numbers did not simply close down possibilities for thinking otherwise about rents,

but they certainly made them harder to think. As noted, other possibilities were persistently present. I argue it is important to note through which “instruments” otherwise ideas were discarded or dismissed – even temporarily. I suggest the instance of making / marking “woman-social” is one such “instrument”, a performance fueled by gender violence, fear and the desire for (economic) certainty. My argument has been that the instruments offering and presumed to contain “reality” made hearing (never mind considering!) some of the original imaginative ideas about how to divide up rent difficult. That a dismissal of otherwise possibilities and the “woman-social” was first uttered by those advocating for “market numbers” is not irrelevant. But what is notable was the ease at which those of us not convinced of the efficacy of “market numbers” were silenced or sidelined by such statements.

To this end, I highlight the ways that the market assessments were employed by some, and how it was that these numbers were granted a discursive power – even by those who, in the main, rejected them out-right. I also highlight how these numbers could be the “go to” instrument when a capitalocentric reading of property and rent was argued for *or* assumed. In these ways, my description stresses how (im)possible it could be, at times, to enliven an alternative economic project whose basis might rest on a discourse of community economies, with its focus on economic interdependence and negotiation. As we saw in the first discussion, it is not as if statements that spoke to the desire for interdependence and a willingness to negotiate weren’t present or voiced. But again, like the otherwise ideas we saw in the discussion of E-PAZ members’ theories of property / rent, much of their talk about interdependence and negotiation was “floaty”; that is, unconnected to discourses of (alternative, community) economy.



It made a difference that whereas almost all of the E-PAZ member ideas about other ways to determine rent required additional research and negotiation, the instruments provided by the market rate assessments provided an already developed method of arriving at rent rates. The later did not actually account for the desires or ability of any tenant organization to contribute to the larger project; but was indeed what was welcoming about them. Had E-PAZ members wanted to take up one of their otherwise ideas on rent, it would have meant further difficult discussions and the development of methods to meet the criteria. Part of the problem then was that the members did not necessarily have the (theoretical) wherewithal or the time to grapple with how the possibility of bringing otherwise ideas to fruition could come about. The “truth” and “reality” of the market rate numbers were welded to ideas about the economy that the group was more-or-less unable to deconstruct. In this way, a capitalocentric understanding of the economy were never far away in the discussions, even though otherwise ideas about rent were likewise present. It was only when faced with the task of determining how to divide up rent that we could see how recourse to discourses and instruments that confirmed “usual” ways of doing things made any otherwise ideas appear less plausible, less desirable, or perhaps even too “wacky” to bring to fruition.

The problem was not that otherwise ideas or their ethical coordinates were effaced. But they were sidelined. This is critical, as it exposes factors for further consideration, including an understanding of the prior geographies upon which otherwise possibilities are trying to be birthed; and the curtailing of conversations surrounding ethical coordinates by the pressure of “proper knowledge”. Members of the E-PAZ had “practices” (of community economy), they also had vague references to stories and

famous adages of community economy (unaccounted here). But they had thin theory, thin discourse. This was not enough to tie well-worn and inspiring adages like “an(other) world is possible” to the work they were doing.

Certainly, as Gibson-Graham and other postcapitalist scholars have noted, enlivening such a discourse is difficult work. Even *D*’s proposal to design rental rates based on “subjective” criteria were relegated as *merely* subjective. This is perhaps unfortunate, as he (and others) seemed open to the idea of negotiating rents in terms of the needs and desires of the collection of tenants. Such an example is of course only one of the possibilities of “otherwise rent”.

The larger point of the chapter was to examine some precise examples of “hold backs” to developing a discourse of community economies within the E-PAZ Co-op<sup>92</sup>. As I illustrate, capitalocentrism and the powerful tools of what has achieved proper knowledge status, such as “market rates”, in how they were used, understood, or performed in the chapter, is formidable. This suggests a role for detailed analysis and deconstruction of such knowledge. Also illustrated were the ways in which capitalocentric discourses and proper knowledge were performed (accomplished) by gender power. Additionally, this chapter’s contribution to the discussion of Gibson-Graham is to show the complexities at play in the making of a specific community economy. My hope is that by working through one example of those difficulties, those trying to build community economies will recognize that it is a fraught process. My argument is that theoretical development is an immensely practical task. This is especially important given that published works promoting “alternatives” tend to focus on positive outcomes and gloss over social relational failures or shortcomings. Relatedly,

where I have come across instances of raising issues related, say, to gendered violence within alternative economic experiments, the common tendency is to dismiss such experiments<sup>93</sup>.

I think there may be more productive ways to build community economies which avoid painting “pretty pictures” or which conclude negatively that alternatives are impossible. I think that what this chapter shows is the difficulties, shortcomings or failures within community economic efforts are more complicated; that is, they can not be adequately summarized as just sexist, as if the other factors highlighted throughout this chapter aren’t also important and impactful. The lack of time, the geography of previous relationships between and among tenants (“politics”), the uncertainty and the fear of raising rents or being priced out, are all factors that I argue can not be separated from gender power or capitalocentrism. To describe and confront the bad within the efforts to build otherwise economies can identify a lot of fodder with which groups can work. If there is an ethical lesson to be wrought here it is perhaps that to confront the “bad” within efforts to build otherwise economies is not to attest to failure; it is rather the very material from which we continue our conversations.

### Chapter 3: Performing social enterprise

Social enterprise as a type of firm has garnered a growing interest in community economic development, alternative economic and government policy circles. This is true internationally, and likewise in the geographical context in which this thesis is embedded. Definitions vary, but a local policy organization defines social enterprise as “a business venture, owned or operated by a non-profit organization that sells goods or provides services in the market to create a blended return on investment; financial, social, environmental, and cultural” (O’Conner et al 2012, 7)<sup>94</sup>. Popular and academic literatures, supporting institutions, educational seminars, international conferences and websites have sprouted up around the idea, but there remains a dearth of critical studies of actually existing social enterprises (Amin 2009).

Much of what I’ll call “SE talk” encountered during my fieldwork did not revolve around topics that preoccupy what literature does exist. For example, the SE talk I heard was not particularly obsessed with what social enterprises “are” – in other words, its definition<sup>95</sup> – or what its benefits or drawbacks might be. Instead, much SE talk revolved around a particular conception of social enterprise: in the main, that social enterprises are *businesses*. From SE talk at learning events I attended to interviews with social enterprise managers, special emphasis was placed on “the enterprise” or what was sometimes called the “business-side” of social enterprise<sup>96</sup>. Although such a focus might be reasonably contextualized within learning communities deemed not to have the “appropriate business acumen”, there seemed to be almost an obsession with explaining “social enterprise” as “one-part business” and “one-part social action or good”.

There was a notable consequence of such talk: The emphasis on business meant that “the social” of social enterprise was cleaved off, figured or imagined as a separate object and quite apart from “the business” aspect of social enterprise. The desire to talk about social enterprise as two parts – the social and the enterprise – was common, hegemonic even<sup>97</sup>. This chapter argues that conceptualizing social enterprise in such a manner is capitalocentric.

Catalyst was different. Although the executive director commonly talked about Catalyst as being entrepreneurial, there was something strange and compelling about how he conceptualized social enterprise. His way of talking about Catalyst did not divide social enterprise into “one part this, one part that”. There was no assured “this is a business” talk at Catalyst that matched the talk about social enterprises that I saw in the larger field. If policy advocates and promoters of social enterprise seemed confident, even insistent, that there was one way to do social enterprise, seeing the executive director in action – at meetings, working with staff, the board or people from other organizations – suggested that perhaps there were other ways of thinking social enterprise. Indeed, as I’ll argue, Catalyst tended toward what we could call a postcapitalist performance of social enterprise insofar as what Catalyst did was not neatly divided into stable and mutually exclusive categories of “business” and “social [good]”.

In order to examine the make up of these different conceptions of social enterprise, this chapter presents two performances of Catalyst. The first performance of Catalyst follows the work of two policy researchers and the executive director as they go about conducting an analysis of the organization. The research project, led by the researchers (in that way representing the larger CED field) insisted on understanding social enterprise

as a dichotomous pairing of the social and the enterprise. This is what I will call a capitalocentric performance of Catalyst-the-social-enterprise in that it could only see social enterprise in what I'll argue is the image of an idealized capitalist firm.

The second performance of Catalyst-the-social-enterprise draws on tours of Catalyst that its executive director gave to visitors from government, policy organizations and those from the community economic development field. In these, "social enterprise" was less "one part business, one part social" than a mish-mash of social, geographical, cultural *and* economic activities that the organization coalesced in innovative ways. I call this a postcapitalist performance for the ways it enlivens a "postcapitalist" take on firms. Such a performance illustrates well the potential of social enterprise beyond a discretely rendered conception of social enterprise as "business acumen" plus "social good"<sup>98</sup>.

My claim is that studying these performances of Catalyst can tell us quite a bit about the nitty-gritty of some formulations of what constitutes "social enterprise" over others. Although the first performance was literally fleeting (two researchers visited Catalyst for about five hours over two meetings), the consequences of such a performance were not: eventually, Catalyst-the-social-enterprise was written up in a policy-research document and both the analysis of Catalyst and the conception of social enterprise entered a growing public array of economic knowledge about social enterprise<sup>99</sup>. My account of the first performance shows specific examples of how the researchers' very conception of social enterprise had consequences for how the researchers' construed the empirical material. My argument will not be to "look how hard it is to perform social enterprise", since all research or knowledge production can be said to be arduous in some way (however defined). Rather, my argument will be that the

choices present throughout the researcher's work that characterized and shaped what constitutes social enterprise (and its supposed component parts) were consequential.

The first performance is important precisely because although the research project may have been unique, the conception of "social enterprise" the researchers used is not. This is key. The first performance of Catalyst used a hegemonic and, I will argue, capitalocentric conceptualization of social enterprise: what I describe as a "business + the social" formulation. What the research exercise provided was an opportunity to examine the material make up of such a conception and what was needed (e.g. other concepts, other materials) to make such a performance work<sup>100</sup>. As the second performance I describe shows, there are other conceptions of social enterprise (and indeed Catalyst) that are possible and that exist<sup>101</sup>.

I should state what I mean when I say that my interest is not with the definition of social enterprise as with its "conception". As I aim to show, in each performance, much pivots on the ways "business" is thought, and even more specifically, how "the firm" relates to what we call "the economic" or "the social" or "the cultural"<sup>102</sup>. Where one performance of "social enterprise" strives to fit social enterprise into a "one part enterprise" and "one part social" scheme, the other does not. The issue here is not that one performance is more true than the other, but that these opposing performances use (or "create") very different conceptions of social enterprise. My analysis of the first performance will illustrate how such a formulation insists on severing the connections between the economic, social, cultural and geographic activities of social enterprise work – indeed, the conception depends on it. The second performance illustrates what happens when other stories of social enterprise are told: stories, for instance, of a porous firm

whose premier task is to bring together disparate policy priorities and actors within a particular geographical area. Such a story places “the firm” outside a capitalist frame, which is why I call it postcapitalist.

To orient my analysis, I begin this chapter with a brief explication of what postcapitalist scholars call enterprise politics. Enterprise politics give us a point of entry and a basic background on critical and ethnographic views of enterprise. I’m particularly interested in how enterprise politics provide theoretical tools to critically examine how we think “the firm” and how predominant ways of thinking firms shape the ways we interact with them. Enterprise politics can give us the wherewithal to trouble notions about business, particularly its relationship(s) with cultural, social and indeed economic stuff. After a brief overview of enterprise politics, I turn my attention to ethnographic observations gathered at Catalyst.

### **Postcapitalist ruminations on the firm**

Postcapitalist scholars suggest that there is no privileged site where interventions and experiments in economies can happen. They may happen anywhere, including in an enterprise. Gibson-Graham and O’Neill (2001) are interested in expanding our thinking about the firm so we might imagine them as sites of ethical economic practices and economies. To them, the firm offers “an array of alternative political possibilities” that are “hidden in the penumbra of the unthought and untried” (57). I see two aspects of enterprise politics. The first concerns the site where (well-known) enterprise politics is most often said to occur within firms and within the production cycle. The second critically assesses how (capitalist) firms are represented.



As Gibson-Graham and O'Neill point out, enterprise politics are usually conducted at the conjuncture between labour and capital. Certainly, unionized workers, in making claims to surplus, have been successful, leading to wage increases, worker benefits, shortened work-days, and so on. But postcapitalist scholars think enterprise politics can be pushed further. They argue that the capital—labour relation is not the only site where questions of distribution, decision making and intervention are possible (Gibson-Graham and O'Neill 2001). Instead, they suggest the capital—labour relation should be thought as one among many sites at which contestation and experimentation is possible.

Further, postcapitalist scholars question an enterprise politics exclusively centered on capital accumulation, arguing that capital accumulation may not be the most important thing enterprises do. They ask: “If the field of surplus distribution were not simply ceded to investments in capital accumulation, what alternative distributions might become imaginable and susceptible to enactment?” (59). Examples might include investments or donations to public infrastructure or goods and services. Within the firm, this could also include choosing to buy inputs that benefit the surrounding communities in some way, either because surrounding communities produce the inputs or are the ultimate customers of a firm's goods or services. Other examples of enterprise politics include consumer pressure on big box retailers to not source or carry products from suppliers engaged in sweatshop production or that endanger or threaten vulnerable species or harm particular ecosystems. All of these political strategies have had much success in the past twenty years and do not focus squarely on capital accumulation. The “place” of enterprise politics is relevant to this chapter because postcapitalist formulations expand the possible sites of ethical economic engagements between the various producers, consumers and so

on within the production cycle. No one site is privileged as “the site” where political struggle for equality can take place.

The second aspect of enterprise politics concerns decentering visions of the firm as singular or bounded, or what Gibson-Graham and O’Neill (2001) call “essentialist stories” of enterprise. Essentialist stories of enterprise suggest that enterprises have one (and only one) purpose – profit – and go about their business in a rational and calculating manner. Engaging in language politics, one postcapitalist strategy developed by Gibson-Graham (1996, 197) seeks to produce stories of firms that “dislodge the more familiar image of the enterprise as a calculating subject that maximizes revenues and then distributes them in accordance with a strategic imperative that must be obeyed if the firm is to survive and prosper”. The aim is to open up enterprise to purposes other than profit or capital accumulation. The claim here is that otherwise purposes are already present within firms. As they see it, our job is to expand non-capital-accumulation activities and purposes of enterprises, as well as expand the desire for non-capital-accumulation activities within firms.

Social enterprises might on first gloss be an already-existing example of what an “ideal” postcapitalist enterprise might look like. But as described in the introduction, how social enterprises are talked about may be detrimental to the otherwise possibilities of firms whose express purpose does not privilege profit. That is because how “firms” are conceptualized affects what is possible to think about all firms. As Gibson-Graham and O’Neill (2001) note, (capitalist) firms are largely thought of as rational, fully centered on profit-motive, and bounded (or “sealed”) entities. They call this particular discourse economic centeredness. Economic centeredness refers to the talk about firms that

conceptualizes and treats them as a universal calculating subject – with one essential identity (capitalist), purpose (profit) and mode of being (in terms of supposed power: initiative, opportunity-seeking, efficiency) (Ruccio and Amariglio 2003; Resnick and Wolff 1987; Gibson-Graham 1996, 200-1). In a writing experiment aimed at decentering such a conception of firms as the universal calculating subject, Gibson-Graham produce discourses of the firm from the perspective of differently positioned subjects – for example, the company, the state, unions, environmental activists and so on. Their thought experiment illustrates that “each ‘account’ interpellates subjects differently, thereby influencing thinking, strategy and action” (1996, 197). Rather than there being one story for a given company, Gibson-Graham argue there are many and each story may be contradictory. Encouraging different and diverse accounts of a company then is a political strategy for opening up places for political intervention within a firm, decentering the firm as a universal calculating subject along with the narrow set of actors assumed to have agency and power in relation to it.

Broadly speaking, postcapitalist scholars question habits of thinking about enterprises, which suggests that all enterprises are the same and all behave using the same rules and values. This habit of thinking about enterprises they describe as “a conflation of the identity of all enterprises with a singular structure and subjectivity”, or what they call a “universal rational calculating subject” (Gibson-Graham 1996, 185-6). Their analysis points away from the traditional conception of firms as static, bounded, and the font of rational decision-making and instead conceiving the firm as a discursive object rather than (merely) a corporate form. As Gibson-Graham write:

“It is almost impossible to talk of the ‘capitalist firm’ as something self-identical, since there no longer appears to be – if there ever was – any organizational form,

management culture or competitive position that can be identified as typical, ideal, dominant, or more efficient.” (Gibson-Graham 1996, 186)

On the whole, the possibilities for enterprise politics cited by postcapitalist scholars call attention to how enterprises are thought and represented, suggesting that how we think and how we represent enterprises affects our political imagination about them. This work can productively challenge commentators and analysts on their dichotomous rendering of social enterprise as simply divisible into “business” and “social” parts; and, for critics of such a rendering, it offers an avenue to refocus conversations on social enterprise and its potentiality in building postcapitalist economies.

As noted in the introduction, much SE talk I encountered in the field tended to tell neat stories of “business”, placing emphasis on “the business side” of social enterprise and seeking, in a variety of ways, to emulate “business” while sometimes also making claim to a social good or a social return on investment (SROI)<sup>103</sup>.

The tendency to render SEs “the same” as business means that questions and projects related to enterprise politics are largely foreclosed. It is imperative then to understand how such a foreclosure is accomplished. How and why does it become possible to talk about SEs as “one part business, one part social” and what happens then? The ethnographic material I draw on below takes up this question.

### **Performing Catalyst**

It was with SE talk ringing in my ears that I went to Catalyst in late 2010 to interview their executive director. At the time, Catalyst Retrofits was a small and growing social enterprise and training program retrofitting low-income dwellings with energy- and water-efficiency upgrades. The bulk of their work involved installing insulation in

basements and attics to increase energy efficiency. They also installed fixtures such as dual-flush toilets, “low-flow” showerheads and tap aerators as well as compact fluorescents. This work meets one of their missions, which is to lower the utility bills of lower income people. Catalyst also runs a training program that hires people with barriers to employment, teaching “trainees” basic skills in carpentry and some plumbing over a six-month term. Training and employment are the second component of their mission. In their 2010 AGM report, they describe themselves as “a non-profit, community-based organization dedicated to combining environmental stewardship and poverty reduction” (AGM report 2010, 5)<sup>104</sup>. As of 2010, Catalyst employed 45 people and in the 2009-2010 fiscal year they had revenues of about 2.4 million dollars, thirty per cent of which came from government funding (“training dollars”) and seventy per cent from fee-for-service revenue earned through retrofit work (the bulk via a contract with the province’s Public Housing Authority, PHA, a crown corporation).

In the next two sections, I present two performances of Catalyst: the first, a capitalocentric performance of Catalyst, and the second, a postcapitalist one. What will be seen is that although the capitalocentric performance confronts many analytical / empirical difficulties along the way, the postcapitalist performance may struggle for legitimacy, even recognition as a performance of social enterprise.

To undertake my analysis, I draw on some of the methods of science studies. As discussed in the introductory chapter, science studies offers a way of thinking about categories like “the social” and “the enterprise” (and indeed, “social enterprise”!) – as outcomes or effects. This is what I mean when I talk about performances. Performances literally “make” (and “make up”) the categories they use. Performances likewise “make”

and “make up” the world as we know it (Law 2004). Such an approach suspends belief in categories and the discourses that employ them as simply pre-existing or already meaningful (Law 2004). Science studies teaches us to focus on practices that go into making “objects of concern” (Latour 2005); objects that can become representations and which involve “assembling and disassembling concerns, people and things in space” (Roelvink 2009, 326).

Science studies allows us to notice what, who and how “social enterprise” is made. As will be seen, neither performance provides us with a “pure” capitalocentric or postcapitalist performance, even if it is fair to designate one as more capitalocentric than the other<sup>105</sup>. The researchers, as we’ll see, are trying to perform social enterprise in a way that allows them to produce numbers that can fit into an already-existing formula for evaluating a “return on investment”. To do so, they need their categories – “the social” and “the enterprise” – to be distinct boxes. What science studies allows is for us to watch how those boxes – and other categories or objects for that matter – are “made”: to look at their “DNA”, so to speak. Pausing over what these performances of “social enterprise” entail allow us to see the possibility of “worlds struggling to exist” (paraphrasing Latour)<sup>106</sup>.

Although both performances are “true,” each works to produce very different Catalyst-as-social-enterprise<sup>107</sup>. Like other instances of my fieldwork “capitalocentric” ideas regularly about “postcapitalist” (or otherwise) ones<sup>108</sup>. What’s noteworthy, I argue, is how the executive director implodes the “social + enterprise” dualism so prevalent in SE talk.

## **A capitalocentric performance**

During my time at Catalyst, I sat in on two meetings with local policy researchers undertaking a study of Catalyst and a second social enterprise operating in another city in the province<sup>109</sup>. What the two researchers aimed to assess was two-fold: the social return on investment (SROI) of Catalyst from the perspective of their government-granted revenues (i.e. grant funding for the training program) and, assuming this exercise resulted in an outcome deemed positive, to develop a model based on Catalyst that could be rolled out elsewhere in the city or province. The task of the two researchers was described by the (self-described) more seasoned of the two as needing to perform “magic” in terms of calculating “the social” and “the economic” picture of Catalyst<sup>110</sup>.

The researchers’ project was aimed at guiding policy. Methodologically, it drew upon accepted methods of evaluating the use of government dollars, including using standard formulas and concepts of evaluation. Their formulas required rather static categories, even ones whose meanings were murky at best. They also required a conceptualization of “social enterprise”, how one might go about evaluating its “success” and its use of government dollars. One problem that emerged was where the “social enterprise” ended and where the “training program” began. It was unknown and (ultimately) undecidable. As I demonstrate, the researchers wanted these two “things” to be separate entities, but since there was only one Catalyst, they wanted the “social” of Catalyst-the-social-enterprise to be the part that the government funding dollars the organization received for training. This would prove untenable. In any case, what will be examined in the following are the capitalocentric ways social enterprise and Catalyst as a social enterprise was performed. To this end, I will be concerned to examine how “the

business” was separated from “the social” in the researcher’s exercise, and some of the empirical assumptions required to accomplish this separation<sup>111</sup>.

Let’s start with some context. The meeting started with what the executive director’s (ED) hopes were for their study: He hoped it would “communicate the benefits” of Catalyst to the community and to government. The more experienced of the two researchers (R1) assured him they would take a “narrative perspective” – and he indicated the study would not be “all numbers”, or a dismal representation of Catalyst from the perspective of abstract economics. Yet, as the lead researcher insisted, their first task was to look at the “financial sustainability” of Catalyst<sup>112</sup>.

At the start of the meeting, the executive director seemed antagonistic. Although he had welcomed the researchers into the boardroom, he had opened the conversation with what he hoped would come out of the research (in sum: “communicate the benefits” of Catalyst). But when his wants weren’t promised (the researchers’ response is above), his retort was a defensive “Explain”. His antagonism can also be seen clearly below: when they wanted short answers, he gave them long ones. When they wanted him to give “the model” of Catalyst, he overloaded them with particulars. Although his annoyance would lessen as the meeting went on, the task of at hand, which involved going through Catalyst’s financials with an eye to recalibrate them in terms of what could be deemed a “social expense” and what could be deemed a “business expense”, the executive director let it be known to the researchers that this was an irritating exercise – mainly by asking why they could not simply ask him about the benefits of the organization.

It is the terms “social expense” and “business expense” that I want to focus on. These were assumed to be self-explanatory but their content was to become a major point



of debate and confusion. What was clear was that the task was not as simple as going over the bookkeeper's balance sheet: the researchers said they needed to find out "the story behind the numbers". To do that, the researchers needed to understand how Catalyst works: its revenue sources and the kind of expenses it incurs.

The second thing I want to focus on in this section are the theoretical practices (Althusser 2009) that the researchers and the executive director are argue about. Although, as indicated, the executive director seemed to have an idea of what research should be, or moreover, do ("communicate the benefits"), there was likewise a powerful theoretical difference, or disjuncture between him and the researchers: The researchers wanted an abstracted version of Catalyst and he wanted a ground one. Part of the researcher's task was to use Catalyst to construct a general model and to evaluate the replicability of such a model elsewhere in the city or province. In addition, their description of accessing Catalyst's SROI was a project of abstraction: The researchers aim to create a representation of Catalyst as a general thing. A thing that was non-messy and shorn from politics and geography. Again, as we will see later, when we turn to the postcapitalist performance of Catalyst, such an approach was the very opposite to how the executive director's understands and seeks to perform Catalyst. Indeed, the researchers' conception of "social enterprise"<sup>113</sup> was a dualistic one the executive director often skirted around.

The researchers' desire (or insistence) for a general, non-messy thing was a problem for the executive director. As the executive director said to other visitors to Catalyst, the surrounding neighbourhood had everything to do with why Catalyst was needed and successful: most of the housing stock was old and leaky (i.e. poorly

insulated), and unemployment was very high relative to the rest of the city<sup>114</sup>. Catalyst, in his view, was trying to change the ways two government-owned corporations (specifically, the public utility and the Public Housing Authority) engaged lower-income residents (including the majority of Catalyst's employees). Largely ignoring Catalyst's location perhaps offended what were the executive director's stated hopes for the study.

The researchers started by asking questions about Catalyst-in-general. The questions they asked were answered by the executive director with great detail. Troublesome particulars. For example, when asked about Catalyst's funded revenue streams, the executive director launched into the history of the funding sources and provided a broad critique of funding criteria. He noted, for instance, that 2010 marked a change in funding streams, a change which was aimed at ending the "administrative nightmare" of answering to four government departments. (The executive director's answer to the researchers was not unlike what we will later witness in the tours he gives of Catalyst.) The problem was: such an answer was simply too much detail for the researchers, who indicated they wanted to create a general "formula" or "model" of the organization. The researchers asked the same question again and received a likewise long answer chalked full of particulars. Finally, the researcher changed tactics, asking the executive director to engage with them on constructing a "Catalyst" from the ground up (the results of that project are seen in the block quotes, below.)

Another disjuncture between the executive director's perspective and that of the researchers concerned who should pay for (something called) "the social"<sup>115</sup>. The executive director stated he wanted to get away from government funding. The

researchers came with the view that government should pay for what they called “the social”.

The executive director’s main protest against government funding was that social-cultural stuff was not counted or deemed of little value. This “stuff” was, the executive director said, a big part of “the social” of Catalyst as a social enterprise. The “social stuff”, according to the executive director, included cultural activities like monthly Aboriginal sweats, as well as food and drivers’ training programs, the latter of which was at one time deemed “unfundable” by government. Even more infuriating, the executive director said, was that government – specifically the department that funded Catalyst’s training program – placed a high value on knowledge products such as modular training materials. Stuff the executive director did not see as important. (He went as far as saying he didn’t know what they were.) The lead researcher questioned the executive director’s take on government funding. He insisted that someone had to pay for “the social”. At one point he stated this bluntly: “The government should be the one who pays”. End stop, as far as the lead researcher was concerned. What’s notable in this was that, again, for the lead researcher, “the social” was equivalent to the grant funding Catalyst received. As such, his understanding of Catalyst-the-social-enterprise could be represented as:

Catalyst = social (government funding for training) + enterprise (earned revenue)

This was a very different formula of social enterprise than the executive director used, where “social” and “cultural” value came from many sources. As the discussions continued, the lead researcher would be asked to confront the fact that his rendering / formulation did not reflect who paid for what<sup>116</sup>.

Although communication between the researchers and the executive director was difficult, this is not to suggest their differences amounted to talking past one another. Something was indeed communicated between the executive director and the two researchers. But throughout communication was difficult, combative, and non-linear. To counteract the force of this difficulty and try to curtail non-linear conversation, fact-finding questions were posed: How many houses and / or apartments did Catalyst retrofit in the last year? How much did each cost? Who paid for it? How many employees did it take? These questions were repeated, over and over: perhaps as a way of sorting out the messy particulars in the executive director's responses from the "final abstraction" the researchers were after.

Although the researchers were interested in undertaking a numerical analysis of Catalyst, they could not do so until they knew how to link those numbers with Catalyst's activities. This was accomplished by storytelling and estimates (see below). Telling the story of the numbers was exhausting work. Talking over the same numbers was difficult and confusing. The meeting was to labour on for three hours.

Here, discussing constructing a model based on how Catalyst operates:

R1: Could you be smaller or at minimum size?

ED: [*Expanding on staff needed.*] One person for HR. Optimum – double stuff. [*i.e. if the administrative staff was reduced to one person, that person would have to have the skills to do more than one job.*] Could operate a program with half the people (~20 people) as long as [the provincial utility's] eligibility [for financing retrofits] and administration costs went down. Four crews of five. 45 units per crew. Four crews could retrofit 160 houses. [*Turning to Catalyst's work to date and estimating the percentage the different kind of jobs represented of Catalyst's overall revenue:*] 'Deep retrofits' in stand-alone houses – including attic and basement, 50%; 2000 water retrofits (4 trainees plus one plumber or 15%); 200 PHA retrofits, 35%—

R1: I want to convert these numbers to one unit – how does it look? At half your size, you could do around 150 deep retrofits....

As we can see above, in order to communicate the story of the numbers and begin to produce an the abstraction of Catalyst that might be able to produce the model “Catalyst-not-Catalyst”, the executive director and the researchers went back and forth: discussing, negotiating and (as above) estimating. We should note how the exercise was a creative process and not at all a matter of simply matching “numerical fact” to “activity”. In ways that might be invisible to us now, scholars who have examined the history of quantification and accounting practice tell us these kinds of practices are not unusual (Porter 1995; Poovey 1998). The researchers were attempting to produce facts and a particular kind of fact: a stable and unchanging object called “Catalyst”, from which they could evaluate Catalyst’s SROI from the government funder’s point of view, and put forward a “Catalyst-not-Catalyst” model that could be rolled out in another geographic place.

In contrast, to such a project, the executive director’s facts were more malleable (or better yet, he recognized the malleability of facts!). Meaning they were open to interpretation and “non-objective”. His facts were also geographically attuned. This is not to say the facts the researchers were interested in getting out of the exercise were the “true facts” – the executive director’s facts were “true” too – only that in order to produce an SROI the researchers needed to come up with numbers which were fixed and singular so that they could meet the standardization requirements of their methodology (drawing on Porter 1995). As the meeting progressed, more figures were added via narrative: productivity estimates of the workers (expressed as a percentage of a “normal” workforce), estimates of success rates or the movement of trainees into second stage

employment (i.e. where trainees go after they are finished with the program), estimate costs of materials, rates of return, and so on.

Even though the stated intention was to evaluate the “social” contribution and its value to government, during this fact-finding portion of the exercise, what the government paid for and what the earned revenue paid for was ignored. These would be the terms (or “the reality”) of Catalyst later on when the SROI exercise demanded that Catalyst be understood in terms of its “social” and “enterprise” revenues and expenses. What’s interesting and will be important for my analysis is that the fact-finding mission of the researchers was aimed at a performance of “Catalyst” as a self-contained and “complete” entity (something that would be referred to as “Catalyst’s reality”); while, paradoxically as we’ll see, there was an epistemic goal of being able to analyze the government’s contributions against those generated by the enterprise. The researchers were not simply or necessarily making empirical or research errors. Instead, the object – “Catalyst, a social enterprise” – was difficult to grasp. It was particularly difficult to grasp with an understanding that “the social” of Catalyst’s “social enterprise” could be easily captured or separated out, so to speak. We’ll see this most clearly when they returned to review their preliminary analysis.

Before we turn to that analysis, we should ask what were the two researchers up to in that first meeting? According to the lead researcher: In terms of calculation, they were up to magic (R1’s description). Such magic had a name. It was what the lead researcher called a “quick and dirty version” of measuring the “social return on investment” (or SROI) developed by The Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF). There are a variety of approaches that have been developed to measure social return on investment,

but REDF's has become one of the most well known. REDF's SROI exercise attempts to measure the impact of funding social enterprises in terms of the direct beneficiaries of social enterprises (in the main, those employed), as well as those that indirectly benefit, in the main, "community" or "society". REDF's approach to measuring SROI,

"Include[s] measuring monetary benefits, such as revenue generated, taxes saved or levied, reductions in social services costs, increase in an individual's economic standing, reductions in crime (and prisoners held in custody) as well as placing a dollar value on those areas that are harder to put a monetary value on such as increased housing stability and self-esteem." (Flockhart 2005, 34)

A step-by-step breakdown of the REDF approach is summarized in Table 3. As Flockhart notes, "A key part of the SROI process is the ability to identify the Social Purpose Value of the enterprise and to monetize these values" (2005, 37).

The first meeting with the researchers that I sat in on was the first step in the production of a calculation of (something called) value. But in order to do so, the lead researcher said they needed to produce objective "black and white" numbers from the (at times) more "colourful" (story-telling and at the same time vague or simplified) numbers the executive director was listing off. Even if we might be inclined (or trained) to see only that the executive director's numerical "story-telling" engaged in "self-interested manipulations" (and the like), Porter reminds us such an interpretation risks missing the ways that the researchers' numbers had to "manipulate" too (Porter 1996, see especially chapter 2). For instance, both the researchers and the executive director agreed without contention that "productivity levels" and other measures were already-existing objects that could be estimated. Notably, the "rough and dirty" SROI didn't need to go study empirically worker's actual productivity. Porter (1996) would suggest this was deemed "reasonable" by both parties because these objects (in this case, productivity levels) have

achieved institutional support. We will see how this exercise played out below. What we can note at this point is that “the social” was (seemingly) referring more and more to the funding provided by the government. But whether this “social” was the same “social” of “social enterprise” – as was first assumed – as the exercise wore on, it became increasingly ambiguous, a fact that was to cause more confusion and contestation as the research exercise continued.

A couple of weeks after the first meeting, the researchers returned to discuss their preliminary analysis, to double-check the numbers they were working with and how they had assigned numbers to the “social” or the “business” side of their SROI balance sheet. The second meeting was not quite as long as the first, but new contentions arose. The researchers had been provided with more detailed financial data from Catalyst’s bookkeeper. They had “worked their magic”<sup>117</sup> on these by taking the current breakdown of revenue and expenses and the qualitative data gathered from the executive director in the previous meeting to construct what they called three “fee models”, described as scenarios a, b, and c.

At the beginning of the meeting, the younger (deemed “inexperienced”<sup>118</sup>) researcher expressed that she was concerned that some of the “magic” they had performed involved including production costs in with what they counted towards social costs. This meeting was not only about checking how and where the researchers had decided to separate “the social” from “the business” but to negotiate that separation.

What could be at stake in the findings will be clear from the executive director’s response – he worried how the bureaucrats he dealt with would react. What I want to pay attention to are some very slight, but important, shifts in language and concepts on how



the researcher's analyzed Catalyst. The meeting began with the researcher's initial analysis of Catalyst's revenue, which seemed to suggest that the government funding Catalyst received subsidized (what they called) "the production side". Talk of "the production side" was new, and many new (if synonymous-sounding) categories were introduced in this meeting, as will be seen.

The preliminary finding that the government funding subsidized "the production side" was not good news for the executive director. This was the finding in one of the researcher's scenarios, a scenario where the researchers did not count journeyman wages as a "social cost" (which here was equivalent to the funding from government for training), making the government funding akin to a wage subsidy to the production (or "business side") of Catalyst. Here is the executive director's response to scenario "a":

ED: [You] can't say that [*government funder*] subsidizes production costs.

R1: I'm not sure that [*government funder*] can't subsidize....

ED: They [*read: bureaucrats, project officers*] would use that to club us over the head.

R2: Can we justify?

R1: If not net flow from [*government funder*] ... then we have to push rates up or down.

[*Pause in conversation.*]

R1: [*Trying to offer a solution.*] Put split between social and production: \$50,000 social expense, [or] 20% of total expenses.

ED: A little low.

R1: How much you would need to charge per unit – how much you would need? [*Turning to the scenarios the researchers constructed:*] Second one: social benefit but no grants – [this] pushes the rate up. Third: grant plus material and cost pushed up.

[*ED is silent. He is studying the spreadsheets.*]

R1: Out of the \$7,400 [*government funder*] pays, the actual social cost is \$5,000.

ED: I don't get scenario c.

R1: Shows the difference between grants and expenses.

S: Scenario c is what we are doing.

[...]

R1: [Scenario c shows a] net transfer from [*government funder*] to the production side.

ED: They are not going to like that.

R1: Well, I mean ... They are training supervisors that go into the net value.

ED: [*Unhappy, resignation.*] Hopefully they won't be smart enough to understand.

R1: Trying to reflect reality. Based on actuals from June 2010.

The calculation pivoted around what was deemed a “social cost” and what was deemed a “production cost”, and placed on either the “social side” or the “production side” of the equation. By “production side” the researcher’s meant the costs related to the construction work that went into energy and water retrofits. In their analysis, the supervisor’s wages were issued to the production side – that is, excluded from the social side, the latter referring to “training” and “on-the-job work experience”. When the researcher’s counted their salary as a “production cost” it meant the journeymen’s labour was counted as exclusively construction-labour, not the one-on-one and group training labour that was a part of their job too. Admittedly, as the lead researcher noted, such a division was the result of a “quick and dirty” analysis of the numbers. But such a decision had an important consequence: The decision to place the supervisor’s wages fully on the production side led to the final analysis that the government funder was “subsidizing production”. In other words, subsidizing the (social) enterprise.

I should be clear that decision to put the journeymen’s wages to the “production side” was not based on the government funder’s criteria for what counted as training (even though, as seen in the above transcript, the executive director’s response would suggest that the funders would not like such a subsidy). Rather, the final analysis was the

result of dividing Catalyst-the-social-enterprise into two component parts: one half “social” (read: training dollars), the other half “business” (read: enterprise). Counting the journeyman’s wages as “production” put their wages on the “business side”. As seen in the transcript, the experienced researcher was sympathetic to the executive director’s concern, and he (partially) concedes that the so-called subsidy also goes toward training. At the same time, he claimed the calculation was nonetheless “reality”.

We should appreciate how the researcher’s task and methodology put them between a rock and a hard place: they were keen to separate the “social” from the “economic” costs, but they were also keen on evaluating the value of the government’s contribution to the “social” (referring, in this latter instance, to the training program). Their formula for what a social enterprise was and how it worked would not allow that the training the journeymen provided to “count” toward the social costs of Catalyst, even though the funding Catalyst received was specifically for on-the-job training. As we’ll see a little later on, this problem was illustrative but not confined to the trainer’s wages. The reason this was so was because not all of the training-related (employment and cultural activities) were funded by government; some revenues generated by the work Catalyst completed in retrofitting basements and attics actually paid for “training stuff”. The researcher’s formula could not take account of this fact.

Readers may have noticed that an attempted solution to the problem was to introduce a new (if similar) category – “production” – which could be contrasted to “the social”, or, what became its synonym, “training”. But this change in nomenclature did not actually solve the problem, since the funding agreement with the province provided the bulk of the journeyman’s wages<sup>119</sup>. It simply was not easy to separate the government

grant supported training program (what the researchers called “the social”) from what they called “the (social?) business”. Despite the lead researcher’s claim, reflecting “reality” was anything but straightforward. The rest of the meeting revolved around what was deemed properly a “social expense” and what was deemed properly a “production expense”. The wiggle room for negotiation was very tight, largely because each side was deemed self-explanatory.

For the executive director (and to some extent, the younger of the two researchers), dividing the “social” from “the business” (or “production”) was not cut-and-dry. For instance, the executive director pointed out that the bookkeeper spends a lot of time with the government funder’s books. His argument was that because the government funder required an institutionally specific financial report, they should pay for this work. (As it stood, the government funder did not contribute anything towards payroll or accounting expenses or staff.) The experienced researcher responded that the funder’s position made sense and that accounting expenses were deemed “production-” or “business-” side because “you would have this expense anyway”. This statement, as mundane as it is, was, I suggest, actually quite spectacular in that it justified the division between the social and the enterprise that the researchers were insisting on. Importantly, such a conception did not (quite) exist beforehand.

Let’s review. The sheer-purported simplicity of the exercise and the acts of division therein, even if it was a “quick and dirty” version of calculating SROI, may make some of these decisions seem quite reasonable, rational, and perhaps non-controversial. That was the lead researcher’s position. He suggested that assigning accounting services to production was uncontroversial when he explained that a production expense was one

that you “would incur anyway”. But we should pause briefly over this statement: presumably, what he meant was “would incur anyway *in the activity of running a business*”, an unsaid phrase of note because even non-business organizations incur accounting expenses in various forms. Such an act of division relied then on particular assumptions about business in contrast to government funded organizations, where only business incurs expenses like accounting costs. As it was, the phrase explaining what was properly a business expense (“an expense you would incur anyway”) was to become a very sharp instrument for cutting “the social” from “the business” (or “training” from “production”), and an epistemological insistence that there were two rather absolutist categories with which the numbers properly belonged.

The negotiation over the numbers (and the research project as a whole) became increasingly heated as the meeting proceeded. On one side was the lead researcher’s cut-and-dry approach and, on the other, the executive director and younger researcher’s more messy approach, an approach that questioned, more often than not, which numbers could be parcelled and, at times, if they could be parceled at all. As noted earlier, the executive director was reasonably worried the funders would come to the conclusion that the dollars for the training program were just a subsidy of (private) enterprise. He was worried because this would be akin to being found out as more like a business than a (social) organization; and more like an enterprise than a training program. Suddenly, being a “social enterprise” was figured as a potential problem.

The younger researcher and the executive director did, however, call attention to how dividing some items and not others was epistemically violent. In the case of the supervisor’s wages, for instance, putting all their wages on the production side relied on

only seeing their technical expertise and labour, not their role as mentors and teachers to trainees. Interestingly, when the group was in the throws of debating the question of what belonged to the productivity column versus what belonged to the social column, they moved from controversy over the supervisor's wages to what, at first gloss, was a clearer and more discernible "social" expense: monthly Aboriginal sweats. Let's look at how this activity was used as an attempt to clarify dividing between "production" and "social":

R1: [If you] enhance the social [it equals a] decrease in productivity.

R2: [*Incredulously.*] What?

R1: Good question. If they go to a sweat, they aren't doing something that you can charge for.

R2: In the moment.

R1: Other social costs – that doesn't take away from productivity.

What was doubly ironic about this exchange is that Catalyst doesn't receive any of its training dollars to pay for the costs related to the monthly sweats. That is, the costs associated with the monthly sweats are charged against the revenues Catalyst makes doing retrofit work. They are not an allowable expense under Catalyst's training funding. This is ironic since the lead researcher claimed that the government should pay for "the social" in the first meeting, and counted the supervisor's wages as "production costs" when in fact the government pays for the majority of these wages and doesn't pay any of the costs of cultural or social activities like sweats<sup>120</sup>.

The younger researcher's incredulity was in response to the truism asserted by the lead researcher that held that any increase in "the social" relies on and leads to a decrease in "productivity" (the business part, the economic real). Here, "the social" and "the economic" were two sides of a scale – increase one and the other decreases. This is an example of how categories like the social and economic are not just assumed (i.e., as

containers), but are often placed in specific theoretical relation to each other. Her point protested the absolutist foundation of the exercise that depended not only on the “fact” that the social was separable from the economic, and that there these two categories shared an inverse relation. Perhaps her concerns stemmed from what at this point was a proliferation of similar (and similarly-related) words-and-categories (the social, business, production, and so on) that tried to “parcel” the same numbers. The array of terms was largely taken as interchangeable; but the younger researcher was suggesting (correctly, I think) that they were not.

Indeed, the younger researcher’s incredulity (and the executive director’s increasing antagonism) put the researcher’s project into question. Although the experienced researcher claimed the method of separation was straightforward, he was not immune from the epistemological chaos that ensued when questions were raised that struck at the heart of how apparently “cleanly” divided categories were messy, or where “direct” productivity was (maybe) more the result of (supposed) “non-productive” activities. Even so, with effort and insistence, he sought to quash these counter-assertions by reiterating and re-inscribing the research project:

R1: [*Reiterating.*] Point of exercise: Is this sustainable without funding? [... ] What we would have to charge in order to continue? You need a subsidy. At the conceptual level. [*Reframing:*] Is the program good or not? If yes, okay. If free lunch [as a social program] leads to more productive workers [than it might be justifiable].

R2: How do you make that case?

R1: Exactly.

R2’s question was not rhetorical – she was questioning R1’s insistence that the research exercise was straightforward and that categories and the parcelling they had done was non-controversial<sup>121</sup>. R1 wasn’t being daft. As I noted, questioning the neat divisions

between the social and the economic and the relationship between them problematized the whole project of evaluating and constructing a model of Catalyst-as-a-social-enterprise. In answering the younger researcher's question as if it was merely rhetorical, the older researcher was, in effect, admitting that dividing up the social from production was as not clearcut as he insisted, nor was the truism he had asserted elsewhere (see above) exactly true, *but it was true enough*. It was this true enough that was enough to hold the research exercise together. It was a glue of sorts, and no amount of exasperation from the younger research or the executive director could un-stick it. The categories "social / training" and "business / production" were allowed to remain fuzzy. But that they were fuzzy was denied – at least by the lead researcher.

Going through the exercise highlighted how arriving at a numerical analysis of social enterprises receiving government funding is difficult<sup>122</sup>. One reason is because at Catalyst some expenses are for activities that go on both "sides" of the "social" (read here: training) and "business" (read here: production). Journeymen and "upper level" trainees in crew leader roles literally do both training and production at the same time. This is the case for expenses the experienced researcher deemed "obviously" part of "production", as in the example of the bookkeeper's wage. A cut-and-dry separation of expenses is difficult and both parties had to settle (if unhappily) for an arbitrary division<sup>123</sup>. At times the researcher's object of research was unclear: Catalyst-the-social-enterprise, Catalyst-the-training-program, or Catalyst-the-government-funded-social-enterprise. Was the social enterprise distinct from the training program, or was it a part of the program?<sup>124</sup> As we will continue to see this is an important, perhaps inescapable,



confusion. What we will turn our attention to more precisely is our topic. How is it possible to think social enterprise in this present?

Construing the accounting services (to cite one example from above), as the lead researcher did, as a “business” or “production” expense, was more than a matter of convenience (although it was that as well). It was also a way of insisting on a separation between “the business” of social enterprise and “the social” (mandate) of a social enterprise. This is (and became) central to how Catalyst-the-social-enterprise was performed here. Despite the haggling and negotiation over the meaning of the terms of division, including the relation between them, what remained steadfast (once articulated) was “what a business looks like”. As I have noted, “what a business looks like” was something of a caricature at best, assuming as it did that business does not engage in social activities or incur expenses that are unknown in organizations like non-profits, charities or associations. But my point is not simply that this is a matter of representation (although it is that too); instead, it is also a matter of the creation of a particular object: “Catalyst-the-social-enterprise”.

Also difficult was the confusion over the meaning of “social”. Did it refer to the government-funded training aspect of Catalyst or the “social” in social enterprise? In terms of how Catalyst describes itself, the “social” good of its social enterprise stems from both its energy- and water-retrofit work and the training-and-employment missions. The design and methodology of the research did not (could not?) account for this. Instead, it assigned one of Catalyst’s social mandates to “(social) enterprise” (retrofits alone) and the other fully to its training program (government contribution). What we saw above was that only some kinds of expenses were deemed “normal” for businesses, a

characterization that assumes that all kinds of enterprises do not incur expenses for social activities such as bonuses, staff coffee room goodies, parties, and so on. This made paramount a definition of “real business” as an essentialist entity that exclusively “engages in profit-seeking activities”<sup>125</sup>, ignoring how “fun” and, indeed social, activities may be a part of the time of business practice and operations.

The executive director and younger researcher were incredulous about the method and madness of the exercise, but they also recognized how their questions were potentially destructive to the research project at hand. Ironically enough, an even more destructive theoretical analysis of the research exercise was to enter the room, embodied in Catalyst’s journeyman plumber. He popped in to ask the executive director a question, giving the executive director a chance to get the plumber’s take on how we in the room were parsing those troublesome numbers. The executive director asked the plumber his thoughts on the social / production split and the percentage we were assigning to trainee’s productivity. His response was that it was “hard to identify numbers for that” because “even in outside industry, someone off the street you’d still have to train them”. The plumber’s point was that trying to attach numbers to things, and splitting them into two absolutist categories is not only difficult, but perhaps quite silly too<sup>126</sup>. The project of separating the two relied on an idealized version of business, or the idea that “outside” for-profit business runs smoothly, and, more specifically, employs labour that is “100 percent productive 100 percent of the time” (plumber’s words). In stating this, the plumber’s comment named an unstated epistemological condition of the exercise<sup>127</sup>. The presumption that labour in private business is “100 percent productive 100 percent of

time” and doesn’t (or shouldn’t) incur training expenses is a story of the firm as a universal calculating subject par excellence.

Momentary silence (and contemplation?) ensued. The research team and executive director did not take up the implications of the plumber’s comments. Why? Well, for one, the plumber’s comment named what the production of a calculation of value (the “social return on investment”) relied on: a supposed natural and unprejudiced “measure” (“for profit business as 100 per cent efficient”) that was plainly and patently false. This was enough to destroy the purpose of the research project and totter its already shaky method. It also called into question the comparison of social enterprise to capitalist enterprise, and with it, the idealization of capitalist enterprise as a model for (something called) social enterprise. The plumber had exposed a dangerous fiction: although they might strive to be efficient, capitalist businesses routinely fall below their mark. He was ushered out of the room. He seemed only too pleased to go.

In this section, I attend to the process of the research exercise and the resulting performance of “Catalyst” that it produced. I examined the theoretical space in which something called “social enterprise” is “made” (conceptualized) and conceptually understood (performed). We saw that even while focused on a research exercise to determine the enterprise’s “value” from the perspective of the government funder, keeping that perspective and achieving it methodologically was difficult<sup>128</sup>. Part of this difficulty had to do with how social enterprise was being “thought” in this instance.

As far as their research project goes, the researchers methods were standard and can therefore be considered sound. Instead, as a specific case of what happens when “social enterprise” is understood as simply “one half social, one half business”, I sought to

highlight how such a performance works vis-à-vis notions of “real business”, and how it was that the research managed to fit (more or less) Catalyst into such a model. This performance was capitalocentric insofar as there was only one conception of business / enterprise, and indeed, only one kind / purpose of “production”. The link between something called “production” and another thing called “enterprise” (where the latter was obvious and “known” – so “known” that its characteristics were left unstated), was also presumed or taken as “obvious”. Likewise, “the social” was configured as practically anathema to “the enterprise”. To put this another way: “Catalyst” could (somehow) actually exist; but the terms and references of evaluation could not quite allow for it. It had to fit already “known” schemas, and follow already familiar practices. In that way, the researcher’s starting “formula” of what a social enterprise was mirrored the SE talk I described in the introduction. Indeed, it is an exemplar of it.

### **A postcapitalist performance**

The second performance of Catalyst I detail comes from the many tours I saw being given of Catalyst’s office and shop. Visitors included government workers, ministers, people from other non-profit organizations, third sector advocates, students, and indeed, researchers. On the whole, tours illustrated some of the ways it is possible to perform social enterprise as a bringing together of social, economic, cultural and geographic concern. As such, performing Catalyst-the-social-enterprise rendered social enterprise as an experimental endeavor. I call this a postcapitalist performance because even if we are to examine the ways “the business side” of Catalyst is said to operate, it is clear “the business side” is a fuzzy rather than absolute category. In other words, “business” is not separate or apart from “the social”, and certainly not anathemic to it either. Although

tours did not fully ensue talking about social enterprise as an easily divisible object, the conception of enterprises employed on did not tend to conceptualize firms as bounded or purely rational. Instead, via claims to its behavior as a firm, firms were conceptualized as connected to other firms and government policy priorities; to the neighbourhood in which they reside; and to the people they employ. In addition, Catalyst was performed as a coordinator and “spark” among diverse government departments and government-owned corporations.

Tours at Catalyst were a common occurrence, and how they were given varied. Reading the tours for their postcapitalist possibilities offer us a glimpse of one aspect of social enterprise politics. In reading the tours for their postcapitalist take on social enterprise, I seek to identify some of the ways of talking about social enterprise that highlight their (possible) experimentalism, specifically in the ways the social, geographical, cultural and economic are rendered as tethered or intertwined. However, even if it was tacitly denied that “the social” of social enterprise could be or is separable from “the enterprise” of social enterprise, this didn’t make Catalyst some kind of “postcapitalist paradise”<sup>129</sup>. Although I highlight the “postcapitalist” representation of this performance of Catalyst, I do not erase capitalocentric aspects. Tours give us the opportunity to witness some of the nuance and contextual character of capitalocentric discourse in action; they also make us aware that these discourses, although present, do not rule whole-heartedly. The “postcapitalist” (otherwise, freaky, connecting) aspects of this performance of Catalyst-the-social-enterprise point us largely to the “fact” of possibility that swirl around social enterprise.

Different tours exposed, critiqued, as well as explained different possibilities for Catalyst and social enterprises more broadly<sup>130</sup>. As we'll see, tours provided the opportunity for the executive director to explain what kind of policy, governmental, or regulation changes are needed, and who needs to make them. Tours were used to explain, promote and advocate for Catalyst as an example (model) of a “community-based approach” to energy-and-water efficiency in low-income neighbourhoods and as a training program for people who are excluded from local labour markets. It goes without saying that tours were given to present Catalyst in the best light possible.

In order for tours to be possible, the office and shop areas of Catalyst were decorated to accommodate the illustration of these topics. That is, the office and shop areas of Catalyst were used to guide visitors and introduce topics of conversation. For example, walls were decorated with photographs of crews working with insulation and construction materials, allowing visitors to “see” the work Catalyst’s crews do without having to visit a construction site<sup>131</sup>. Another wall in the office was lined with “success” photographs of employees who had passed their written drivers’ test or passed the road test.

We can stop at one such display found on the wall beside an entrance to a long hallway that separates the front office from the shop (See Figure 3). On the right-hand side of the entrance to the hallway, there hangs a large 16'' by 20'' group photograph of everyone who works at Catalyst, including office staff, crew supervisors and trainees. The photo was taken from the loft overlooking the back of the shop, so that on one edge of the photo a stack of 2x4s can be seen, and on the other edge, a stack of drywall. In the center of the photograph: smiling faces. People looking up at the camera. Huddled

together. A few have their arms around each other. The photo looks like it was taken by a professional photographer (it's no snapshot) and has been professionally mounted. Hanging above the photograph is a row of baseball hats with "Catalyst" embroidered on them.

Tours often started at this display. The picture could provide a segue to talk about Catalyst's demographics as mirroring the demographic of the neighbourhood. In such a case, the focus is on Aboriginal faces and on inner-city residents; on absolute poverty, which could slide into a discussion of energy poverty<sup>132</sup>. The tour I received when I first came to Catalyst to interview the executive director only included a brief stop at the picture<sup>133</sup> but the following excerpt from our interview (itself conducted while "on tour") is an example of what might be said:

A lot of the guys we hire cannot get social assistance because they [...] are able-bodied male. And they can't get EI [Employment Insurance] because they can't get a job. [*Light sarcasm:*] Then there [are] incredibly high crime rates for some reason, right? [*Back to normal voice:*] There needs to be some options for these human beings who are wonderfully creative and compassionate. They just need a place to get going, to get out of the cycle. And the second need was to ramp up the energy efficiency in the low-income sector. [...] Low-income families have not been able to access [energy-efficiency incentive or financing] programs. Partly because they don't live ... where they live they don't own. Partly because they don't have the up-front capital. Because of all the other daily needs: food on the table or insulation in the attic? It's an easy decision. And the only way to tackle that is with a community-based approach. [...] These are things that are no-brainers. We've got to reduce crime rates and we've got to get people opportunities. [And] there is energy poverty [...] – that's a quiet problem, but it's big and real. (Interview, 22 September 2010)

Savvy on producing political passion and promises, the executive director's rhetorical strategy allows him to engage various audiences in diverse topics and to point out their interconnections. Above, the executive director slides from one social or economic issue to inform another. As a theoretical practice, his "argument" says that

these diverse issues are inter-related; and that multiple social and economic problems can be solved when the interconnections between them – chronic unemployment, high crime rates, leaky houses – are recognized. This is a common analytic and rhetorical strategy the executive director uses to explain “Catalyst”<sup>134</sup>.

Tours were often a way to engage political actors – policy-makers, planners, and government – on how their respective organizations intervene in the local neighbourhood (unknowingly was often the implication) and how they should be intervening. The “draw” – not readily apparent in the text below – was that Catalyst was something different: a social enterprise. I want to explore more of this by turning to a longer tour transcript I recorded when a community economic development (CED) conference group visited Catalyst. This particular tour’s motif was about how Catalyst “came to be” and which other organizations (government bodies and publically-owned corporations) Catalyst was attempting to influence. During this tour there was a lot of accounting for the trials and tribulations of getting partners on board; the troubles that come with government funding; and how Catalyst has fought (and won) various battles relating to their operation and development. Here we will see again the production of linkages and overlaps between the social, geographical, cultural and economic, and, on first blush anyway, the celebration of social enterprise-as-entrepreneurialism. At the same time, I examine the ways categories like the social, cultural and economic are alighted, and how “social enterprise” is “made up” in relation to these. Despite the entrepreneurial rhetoric, Catalyst is performed here as a (social) firm that is porous, affecting change by challenging bureaucratic thoughtlessness as well as the boundaries of government-owned corporate practice.



Describing the retrofit work that Catalyst does, the executive director begins by framing their work in relation to the geography of low-income housing:

ED: [...] We're just making the case that there are 80 thousand low-income houses in [the province] and another 40 thousand of public housing – you could have 20 contractors. So we love the fact that [the public utility] has two other private contractors because we [retrofitted] 143 of these private households last year [...] How long it would take to do 80 thousand of them if we were doing them on our own? [...] Can you imagine the work? The green jobs? That's just astonishing and it has a payback. Part of the question is, who is the payback to?

Many of those 80 thousand [homes] have people on social assistance [living in them], so [the public utility's energy retrofit program for lower-income people] now declares those people ineligible [for retrofits]. But in [the province], social assistance adjusts its rates depending on what the utility bills are, so the reason why [the utility] makes those people ineligible through their program is because the [supposed] beneficiary is government. That's why we need new legislation [that] says '[the public utility] should retrofit half of those 80 thousand houses in the next ten years'. Period. The language is very critical because otherwise it's complicated – two years ago there would be an 8 unit side-by-side. Unit 2 was eligible, unit 6 was eligible, but the rest weren't, right? So we show up with our truck. Imagine blowing [insulation] in the attic? Its like, "guys, don't get any stuff over top [of the rafters]". You know that – because of transience and stuff – you know there are going to be other eligible families in there in the next 30 years, without a doubt. So [this is an example of] how mistakes were made when the funding was set up. When the funding was arranged. I would never suggest in a million years that money should be going to the government and their MBA's and, god forbid, PhDs [*Laughs*] that are paid enormous amount of money and are just going to micromanage everything – it makes it difficult. So now the relationship we have with [the social housing corporation] is great – we're just a contractor. And [the public utility] does the pre- and the post-audits, so everybody knows we are doing it right. And they come in here and do the training, so that's perfect. We want to have them as a partner [but] we don't want them paying bills.

Above, the executive director is not criticizing the funding of Catalyst, but the funding of a government-owned utility's incentive program for water and energy retrofits in lower income homes. That funding determined where and if energy retrofits could happen. And even through the funding was for lower income people, it barred homeowners who were receiving income assistance. The executive director's argument is that the government is (ultimately) paying for the "leaky" difference. His larger critique is that the program does

not match the geography of Catalyst's neighbourhood. He will go on to challenge how the utility's lower-income funding is set so that only those lower-income people who own their homes are qualified to receive retrofits. As the executive director will point out, this doesn't account for the neighbourhood's geography, where upwards of 70% of people in single-dwelling households are renters with most occupants paying for their utility bills.

The story also launches into why Catalyst is now working (at the time of the tour) exclusively for the Public Housing Authority – trying to work around the utility's rules-and-regulations was literally senseless on the ground, as the story of directing crews not to get insulation "over the rafters" suggests. By working for the Public Housing Authority, Catalyst is benefiting government by lowering the publically-owned corporation's utility bills. The public utility, on the other hand, has excluded (ultimate) benefits to government by continuing to exclude lower-income households who access social assistance from incentives to lower their utility bills.

The executive director also emphasizes the relationship that Catalyst and the Public Housing Authority have: a contractual one ("we're just a contractor"). This is the heart of social enterprise according to the executive director: the relationship between the housing authority and Catalyst is a business relationship, which is what he means when he says "We want to have them as a partner [but] we don't want them paying bills". "Paying the bills" then refers to what government funders are and do. Notably, the executive director also highlights – indeed begins his story – with the unrealized prospects for employment in the neighbourhood and the province ("80,000 social housing units"). That those living in these units might want to work and be given the first opportunity for employment in retrofits in their neighbourhood is implied.

His description of what Catalyst is elicits a comment from his audience:

Q1: But when you started it, you weren't just an employer, you were training.  
ED: Yes. We insisted on it. Otherwise it was just another work program. A training camp. No, this is a job. I love that. When we're interviewing – to reach across the table and say 'Congratulations, it's going to be great to work with you'. As opposed to, 'Oh, if you come to work every day, we'll give you a government cheque'. There's a big difference. It's a source of pride. It really – that's where social enterprise is so great. The work is very valuable. On the Left, we undervalue that – the entrepreneurial culture. Just the gift of going to work every day. To feel good about doing something productive for your community. So yeah, it's the ticket out of poverty. And the guys come – most of them are just absolutely unemployable. I had two parole officers in here the other day. It was absolutely fascinating. I thought they were trying to look for somebody that had breached or something. [...] They said, 'Yeah, our job is to keep track of the 15 worst gang offenders in [the province]' and they have to track them down three or four times a week. And the second thing they have to do is find these guys work. And the second guy said, 'You know, I can't find these guys work'. No one wants to hire them. [He asks me,] 'Would you hire them?' [*Laughs*].

Above, we see how the executive director makes a (questionable?) link between employment and a culture of entrepreneurship. Here, work as a culture and source of pride is linked to entrepreneurial culture, and moreover, it is this link that makes “social enterprise” great (read: new and innovative). He completes this by opposing what's “great” about social enterprise – it provides jobs – as opposed to a hand-out “government cheque”, or in other words, social assistance. His “argument” is left unexplained and stated as obvious fact. On the one hand, he can be said here to literally be “making” Catalyst as a social enterprise-as-entrepreneurial via the employment relations made with trainees. It might be he is naming how trainees are positioned by Catalyst staff – i.e., not as clients (although funders use this language) but as employees. In this sense, Catalyst-as-a-social-enterprise allows the non-profit to engage in social relations that are not “helping” in the paternalistic sense that is common and expected of social welfare organizations. Whether one buys his theory or not, the executive director changes the

conversation about unemployment in the neighbourhood: there are jobs for people in the neighbourhood, but certain regulatory bodies are keeping this work “off the market” (the public utility), *and* the people living in the neighbourhood should have “first dibs” on the employment that is opening up in retrofit work (with the Public Housing Authority).

His apparently “senseless” discursive moves make claim and simultaneously attempt to modify the relation between “the meaning of work” and “entrepreneurial culture”. Certainly, there is a long history of entrepreneurial discourse that deems business and entrepreneurs as the proper and most efficient at increasing (nay, creating) employment opportunities. There is an element of this in the executive director’s speech. The executive director also, in a way, changes the subject by sliding into a story of the two parole officers who are looking for employment for the “15 worst gang offenders” and report being largely unsuccessful. Catalyst, he intones, is already putting to work “unemployables”.

The audience member’s question forces the executive director to address the fact that at least part of Catalyst’s operations is funded through government funding. And government funding – its headaches and stupidity – make up a good part of any tour. Here are two separate excerpts:

ED: [*Launches into an example:*] So the federal government through the [*government*] program – just this week we signed a contract with them to give us four apprentices. They are going to pay 12 bucks out of the 16 [dollar wage] – so we can pay for four more Aboriginal apprentices. Federal government money, right? Well, the bureaucrats at the province are saying we can’t do that because they are going to be working with the journeyman carpenters that are being paid by the [province]. So I’m thinking ... okay. So these guys are free, they’re Aboriginal, they’re [provincial citizens]. [*Light mocking:*] And that’s a problem for you? So we can insulate more houses and train more people? [...] So we got to get the politicians involved to get these guys [bureaucrats] straightened out. [*As if talking to a bureaucrat, incensed:*] “Just listen to yourself”. And then you have more guys because they would be “Steve”, hired as a [*Level 1 Carpenter*

*apprentice, former trainee and Aboriginal man*] category, right – more guys like “Steve” that are able to mentor the guys [trainees] that are coming in. So it’s a whole lot of value that they aren’t paying for. (Tour, 21 October 2010)

And:

The most successful thing we do is the driver’s training program. But we asked the government for funding to do it. And our friends [the government funder], they said, ‘We can’t fund you to do that’. We said, ‘Well, why not? You have to have a license in the trades to get a job in the trades.’ And none of these guys have a license because our license system is based in high school. You go to high school, you pay 50 bucks, you can get the tutoring and all the training. (Tour, 21 October 2010)

The executive director’s open and trenchant critiques of government funding and its related bureaucracy contravenes assumptions made in social enterprise research that social enterprises are subjugated to the whims and protocols of government policy. For instance, that there were no funding dollars for a drivers’ training program, did not stop Catalyst from starting it and later successfully advocated for a change to their funding contract so that the drivers’ training was covered under the auspice of “training”. This means what could count as training was effectively changed by Catalyst<sup>135</sup>. What’s interesting about this, when compared to the UK-based literature, is “push back” by social enterprise is related to funding and policy rather than to defining the purpose and role of social enterprise in society (Hogg and Baines 2011; Teasdale 2011; Parkinson and Howorth 2008)<sup>136</sup>. In this way, we might observe that the executive director is in effect taking advantage of a lacune of policy and focus around social enterprise by the provincial government. He is, in this sense, charting out what social enterprise “is” by noting what it is not – in the main, “bureaucracy”<sup>137</sup>.

Here, as a separate (social) enterprise, Catalyst is reliant on government funds but able to maneuver in such a way to effectively question standard funding procedures and

priorities. This includes starting a drivers' training program irrespective of having government training dollars for it, and then forcing the government funder to modify what they are able to fund. This is an example of Catalyst's experimentalism<sup>138</sup>.

The comparisons and similarities cited between Catalyst and private business were quite common on tours. They were always part of the show. This part of the executive director's performance is one that idealizes "private companies" and make claim to an association between Catalyst and these generalized "private companies". Notably, "private companies" or "business" more broadly often provides a foil to the trials of government funding. Indeed, we could say the executive director (re)produces a dichotomy between business and government-funded training programs in order to argue – and constitute – Catalyst as a "social enterprise *plus*" rather than a "training program plus". This dichotomy is hidden – that is, in the background. At a theoretical level, this allows the idealization and valorization of private business to operate without scrutiny. In short, his rhetoric is borrowed from the pages of capitalist triumphalism, even as the content of his claims run counter to rally-cries for privatization and (corporate) profit.

Importantly, at the same time, it allows for trenchant critique of how government funders ignore and fail to allow the cultural-social-economic to "come into the picture" in the way of funding for programs deemed by funding bodies as "outside" their criteria. So if at first the (trades- and employment-based) funder did not think having a drivers' license had anything to do with not being able to get a job in the construction industry, Catalyst was able to show (or argue) that this was not the case. Valorizing "business" and producing commonalities between "private business" and Catalyst calls attention to funding limitations that come from particular and limited policies that fund Catalyst for

its training activities. In such a way, Catalyst is actively involved in shaping policy and practice. Additionally, the executive director's rhetoric resists being perceived as "reliant" on government funding, especially when that later is deemed as restricting creative thinking. That's because rhetorically "creative thinking" is a staple aspect in discourses of entrepreneurialism.

Throughout the transcripts from the tour, we can see how the executive director travels among different regulatory bodies, the utility board and its legislation, the province's public utility and its programs for lower-income homes, to the relationship they have built with the Public Housing Authority (i.e., becoming a vendor rather than a recipient of a grant), to issues with funders over different levels of government paying wages and for the employment-and-training focused provincial funding for Catalyst's driver-training program. What also appears on the stage are a series of problems and solutions. The need and want for meaningful and non-degrading work by would-be trainees is paired with barriers to entry for ex-cons into the labour market (the parole board officer asking "Would you hire them?"). In one sense, tours are a presentation of "quick fixes", but my argument is they are more than that too. Tours are an itemization of organizations, institutions and regulatory bodies that need to coordinate in order to solve problems. The problems, in turn, become inclusive of endemic poverty, energy poverty and environmental degradation.

I want us to keep in view what emerges in such a performance of Catalyst. The line distinguishing "the social" from "the economic" is fuzzy or overlapping; indeed, economic, social, geographical and cultural matters are interwoven. Employing slippages between issues and describing "the ease" of solutions allows the executive director to

claim, blame and make “wild” proposals of how to address unemployment, poverty, crime, environmental concerns and government deficits. If we view these discursive gestures as a series of theoretical moves, such a performance is one of the ways that Catalyst attempts (and succeeds) in intervening in the objects of Catalyst’s concern.

Most tours I witnessed revolved around the problems with government funding, procurement or incentive packages for lower-income residents. The apparent absence of focus squarely on social enterprise can be contextualized by the low interest of the local government in social enterprises, a contrast to the UK experience (see Mason 2012). Indeed, the executive director’s tours seemed to follow-while-challenging the government’s interest on addressing crime, poverty and “skill gaps” (including among populations traditionally excluded from trades-accreditation and the labour market more broadly<sup>139</sup>). Where “social enterprise” fits in is in the shadows, so to speak. “Social enterprise” along with a chosen set of key words (entrepreneurialism and its cognates) are used as tools to critique what is funded and what kind of activities are given policy priority within and beyond Catalyst. In such a way, “social enterprise” is figured as part of an activist movement that draws on entrepreneurial authority to critique funding policy and criteria for political intervention.

Although on the one hand there is a hero narrative at work – Catalyst as the lone rational player among bureaucratic fools – there is an element of the performance that questions the economic centeredness and rationality of, say, the public utility; or even the desire for economic centeredness and domination on the part of a player like Catalyst. The overarching narrative is that Catalyst is a coordinator among and between publicly-owned corporations. In this case, the social enterprise performs a number of inventive



tasks: the creator of innovative employment programs (the drivers' training program as part of skills-based training), government cost-reduction initiatives (retrofits to "leaky" households that government departments may be fitting the bill for, savings to a social housing corporation), and positive environmental changes (a reduction in heating / water bills also equals to reducing environment impacts). Unlike a "normal business", the benefits Catalyst makes claim to include both community members and the public at large.

Above we saw how Catalyst performs itself as a social enterprise and as a vehicle for substantive change. This was a very different rendering of Catalyst than we saw in the research exercise, where "the social" was understood as separable from "the enterprise".

## **Conclusion**

This chapter illustrates the effect of theoretical practices that attempt to fit "social enterprise" into already existing narratives of economy and, more specifically, to equate social enterprise with (idealized ideas about) "business". Examining these two performances of Catalyst allow us to question the ease which social enterprise can be separated into "social" and "business" components, and provide the opportunity to explore otherwise performances. The two performances examined gave us a contrasting view – one where the categories "social" and "enterprise" were two separable parts of what makes (up) "social enterprise" – what I called the capitalocentric performance, and the other, where "social enterprise" was instead figured as a convening entity, bringing together individual and institutional actors to re-write policy and, perhaps more specifically, to intervene in the neighbourhood, and to work more effectively. The latter, I suggested was a postcapitalist performance – if only in the sense that "business" or

“enterprise” is not presented as separate from “the social”, nor is capitalist business presented in its idealist form. In lieu of “SE talk”, the difference here is both slight and significant.

My account of the performance of Catalyst generated during tours also provided some of the larger political and geographic context of the organization. I show how appeals to entrepreneurial culture were made as a way of critiquing both the funding that Catalyst receives and the ways that government-owned corporations act within the neighbourhood. Here, social enterprise politics is politics; in other words, Catalyst-the-social-enterprise attempts to shape the regulatory environment maintained by government and publically-owned corporations. They do so by showing the connections between objects of concern. Social enterprise politics, concerned with highlighting the coming together of government, environmental and poverty-reduction interests, rely on contravening “entrepreneurial talk”. Although provisional, this performance addresses calls within the social enterprise research community to include and investigate how people in and running social enterprises understand and construct their work and organizations (Boddice 2009; Dey and Stevaert 2012; Mason 2012).

Although we should be cognizant that we are always listening to the executive director’s interpretation and suggested reading of Catalyst, concluding that government dictates the shape, scope or development of this social enterprise may be an oversimplification (*contra* Parkinson and Howorth 2008). This is not to ignore that policy and regulation shapes and creates governmental power, but it is to insist that the power of elected officials and bureaucrats is partial, fragmented and uneven (Gill 2010; Mountz 2003; Hyndman 2001)<sup>140</sup>, and they are certainly not the only actors defining and making

“social enterprise” (Mason 2012; Dey and Stevaert 2012). Importantly, the tour might be viewed an active political site through which interventions with policy and government-funding practices become possible, and where the “place” of social enterprise is brought into being<sup>141</sup>.

We should of course be aware that there are many possibilities for how social enterprises are performed. The purpose of my chapter is to show how the work that goes into performing social enterprise one way or another involves and enrolls particular ideas about “business”, “the social”, and further, there are choices to make regarding how the social, cultural, political and economic relate to each other. I highlight the varying ways that performances generated their “being” from existing and experimental ideas about enterprise and enterprise politics. The contrast between the two performances also shows some of the ways that how “social enterprise” is performed affects what is seen and imagined. When the project to think social enterprise is limited to existing visions (and sometimes, caricatures) of “business” or “economy” (as well as its relation to “the social”), we can become stuck trying to fit a model that just doesn’t fit. This is consequential when one performance highlights and expands experimental opportunities, while the other does not tolerate such expansive thinking. Postcapitalist thinking gives us some of the tools to see these differences.

The fact that social enterprises (and their advocates) fall into the trap of business triumphalism is reason to nurture the notion of social enterprise as a not-so-easy to “divide” form of enterprise – or that there might be a more imaginative vision of social enterprise to enlist in our “talk”. Lastly, despite some of the easy critiques and valid worries some might have about social enterprise, drawing on postcapitalist work can shift

our attention to concerns about (social) enterprise politics, whether that be with questions of distribution (as in Gibson-Graham and O'Neill's work), or, as in this chapter, with questions of the performative work that goes into in the creation, assembly or formatting of an object of concern called "social enterprise" and its roles in building alternative economies (drawing on Latour 2005; Roelvink 2009)<sup>142</sup>.

## Chapter 4: Becoming cooperative

“Are you okay?”

“I’m okay.”

“Okay, are we going to be okay?”

[*Laughter*]

(*E-Zine*, 18).

Above, in what was a recorded and later printed discussion between myself and “B”, a fellow participant in building of the E-PAZ Co-op, is how we described (and lightly mocked) what I’ve come to think of as “the apology”. The apology was heard during, at the end, and after E-PAZ member meetings. It often began with the standard “I’m sorry” that makes an apology an apology, followed by specifics, like: “I’m sorry I wasn’t a good facilitator”. Or, “I’m sorry I couldn’t keep us on track [during the meeting].” Often, if not exclusively, uttered by the facilitator, the apology involved a person taking personal responsibility for the group’s failure – to stay on topic, to end on time, to bring the group to consensus, or to formulate a decision. The apology was sincere and, in my experience anyway, compulsive and gut-wrenching for the apologee. To speak of the apology as a general and frequent act, an obvious feature of the apology was that it was most often made by women (of which there were very few individual members). The apology was also a prelude to ask and respond to the emotional well-being of others. (Although I only realized this long after the spell of the apology was broken. Perhaps this is what *B* and I were mocking without knowing what or why we were mocking it.) The questions “are *you* okay?” and “are *we* okay?” are the follow up to the apology: a “feeling our way” that sought to address the emotional content of our social relations and the many failures involved in our efforts to become cooperative.

Although there were many equally gut-wrenching moments in the process of building the E-PAZ Cooperative and working to buy its building, the apology stands out in its frequency. Yet it escaped notice for a long time<sup>143</sup>. In one sense, the apology was a “tic”. This chapter stages multiple returns to the apology and the transcript that marks its recognition to present a case study of becoming in the context of cooperatives and the E-PAZ Cooperative more specifically. In that way, the chapter takes up Gibson-Graham’s and postcapitalist scholar’s interest in becoming, concentrated in the world of cooperatives and in the E-PAZ Cooperative<sup>144</sup>.

Gibson-Graham argue that we can not bring into being economies that are otherwise without at the same time reinventing or reconfiguring our relations to ourselves and others, or our economic identities and sense of self. But becoming otherwise is tricky and difficult, they note. The work of making subjects and forging new social relations, which Gibson-Graham dub “the hard work of stitching”, can get lost among the practical questions facing fledgling economic projects. It requires reflection, talk of difficult matters, recognition of unruly (and sometimes less-than-flattering) emotions and the like. It can also be puzzling and at times senseless too. Gibson-Graham write “the process of becoming a different economic subject is not an easy or sudden one. It is not so much about seeing and knowing as it is about feeling and doing” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 152). My aim in this chapter is to fill out the context and setting(s) of the apology as a way to explore questions of becoming cooperative, specifically as they impacted the E-PAZ.

What is tricky or difficult about becoming and forging social relations of course depends on the context and the conditions within a given project. The E-PAZ Co-op was formed by tenant-organizations who rented space in a heritage building; over half of the

organizations were worker-cooperatives, with the remaining tenants made up of social or political organizations as well as a few small businesses<sup>145</sup>. For over a decade before the story of this chapter begins, the E-PAZ building was managed by the owner and, in a rag tag sort of way, by the tenant organizations. The owner moved on to other projects, but the mortgage and operation of the building – dubbed the “no fun stuff” (building repairs, tax and building code related matters, rent collection, rental agreements and so on) – continued to fall on his shoulders. He approached people working in the building in late 2009 about his desire / need to sell the building, with the offer of selling it at a discount (i.e. below market value) if tenants formed a cooperative to own and manage it<sup>146</sup>.

Importantly, the E-PAZ was not a new idea in terms of its goals or in terms of its political and ethical affiliations; yet when it was incorporated as a cooperative, that *was* new. This is an important detail for what follows. From the beginning of the formation of the E-PAZ as a cooperative, an assumption was made that would have important consequences for our story of becoming cooperative. The assumption made was that the current tenants would be the natural members of the E-PAZ Cooperative. For the most part, this is what would come to pass: most of the long-term tenants would become members<sup>147</sup>. Unanticipated, though, was that not *all* tenants would be interested or desirous of a cooperative and working with other tenants cooperatively. In addition, although there was a desire to form a cooperative (i.e., the organizational form), again, unanticipated was that becoming cooperative (referring here to social relations) was something different and would be difficult. Many, if not most, of the tenants had been working together in the building for many years, but the fact that the E-PAZ Co-op was a new thing meant that new social relations between old friends had to be forged.

“Becoming cooperative”, I argue is distinct from the act of incorporating as a cooperative.

Over the three years from the birth of the idea of the E-PAZ Cooperative to the building purchase, two rather simple mistakes were revealed: membership in a cooperative is not equivalent to becoming cooperative, and not everyone tenanted in the E-PAZ building would want to become members of the cooperative. Using the apology as a way in, this chapter tells these facts as a story of “difficult knowledge” (Britzman 2003) – learning (rather straightforward) facts that, for members of the E-PAZ, were hard to take. As I show, acts like the apology sought, if unconsciously, to cover up difficult knowledge. The chapter’s analytical work offers an explanation as to why such facts were so difficult. I suggest these difficulties arose because of the constitutive fantasies the E-PAZ as a group shared with respect to cooperatives / cooperation and participatory democracy, a key value for the E-PAZ group.

The apology spurs me to remember illustrations of the difficult work of learning to become cooperative. Much of the story I tell about the apology revolves around our use of formal consensus, that procedure of democracy, which, as the work of philosopher Jacques Rancière teaches, cannot birth democracy when it is reduced to a functional procedure. Just like the laughter in the transcript that recalls the apology (its recording took place on the precipice of when the apology lost its compulsory power), my stories seek to illustrate how our practice of formal consensus was shot through with an idealization of the cooperative form, one which got in the way of what might instead have been a concern about becoming cooperative. In short, our fantasies about cooperation blinded us from what, in retrospect, should have appeared as obvious knowledge.



The chapter is structured follows. In the first section, I provide a brief outline of the interest in becoming as it appears in the postcapitalist literature. To orient the reader, I then provide an in-depth description of the Co-op's structure, decision-making process, and group dynamics. Throughout I stage various returns to the apology using the transcript cited above, which acts as interruption and offers an opportunity to layer contextual material and analysis as we go. This process of interruption and layering allows me to consider what the structure and decision-making process looked like in practice – its very messiness – and thereby introduce some of the difficulties among members that emerged in these practices<sup>148</sup>.

### **Subjects of economy otherwise**

Who subjects are and what it means to be or become are not new topics by any means; questions of being and becoming are key areas of interest across the social sciences and humanities, particularly in feminist and queer theory and in works characterized as post-structural. Spurred by writers like Michel Foucault, whose historical analyzes countered ideas about innate identities or identifications (1990), and Judith Butler, whose early work pushed feminists to think critically about the ways gender *and* sex are socially constructed (1990), contemporary interest in the subject explore the complex ways in which “we” come into being as outcomes or performances of discourse and governance. In his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, for example, Foucault argued that sexuality is a modern invention of the self, meaning people's ability to say they “have” a sexuality is a modern invention (1990). At its most basic, this work on the subject assumes that who “we” are – and the identities we attach to ourselves – is not the

outcome of universal character traits of “being human”, but rather the result of historical and geographical processes.

The making of subjects, or what are called processes of subjectification, has likewise become a research interest for contemporary economic geographers, even if there is debate about its relevance or value to economic geography, whose disciplinary history has tended to focus on “big structures” or processes (Larner 2012)<sup>149</sup>. Gibson-Graham’s work suggests that the process of becoming new subjects is part and parcel of the process of building community economies. Earlier chapters of this thesis offer examples of the co-relation between building otherwise economies and the changing sense of self, although my emphasis in those chapters is on economic knowledge rather than on subjects or subject-making. Think of the difference seen in Chapter 2 between a subject feeling powerless in the face of “the economy” and a subject feeling like an active participant in the creation of economies. Each “feeling” describes a very different subject: one cowering; the other confident. These feelings – really, a stance and investment – affect a subject’s ability or capacity for action. The cowering subject has a different relationship to the economy than the more confident one. This is a simplified explanation of Gibson-Graham’s more general point that we “are” subjects of economy: our sense of self or identity is shaped by our economic position(s) and activities; *and* how the economy is conceptualized and brought into discourse affects what is possible for us to become.

Gibson-Graham’s interest in the subject also stems from their notation that “the richness of individual subjects’ economic lives is something that is rarely appreciated” (2006, 77). In other words, hegemonic and capitalocentric discourses offer a narrow set

of economic identities or subject positions. For example, wage-earners tend to identify exclusively with that economic identity, even though they might put equal or more time into economic activities such as unpaid labour in their home or community. Postcapitalist scholars interested in the subject, with “becoming” and / or with (economic) identity are interested in investigating why and how this is accomplished. For Gibson-Graham’s projects in particular, they ask: Can recognizing and cultivating non-unitary economic identifications and identities be another opening “for new economic becomings – sites where ethical decisions can be made, power can be negotiated, and transformations forged” (2006, 77)?<sup>150</sup>

Yet postcapitalist scholars (and the theorists on work they draw) claim that becoming otherwise is difficult. Why? First, recognizing that one has economic identifications can be tricky, given that most economic identities are understood as social identities (for instance, volunteer; see footnote 146). Another reason why thinking about becoming otherwise is difficult and tricky is because becoming otherwise can feel like nothing or not much at all. This is what Gibson-Graham mean when referring to “fleeting ethical moments” – those times when people can name community economic assets and engage in their further creation, but which “appear to represent very minor shifts in the macropolitical scheme of things” (154). Still, such shifts can mean moving affectively from fear and an attachment of seeing oneself as a victim of the economy to an interest in becoming-fearless with others in the acts that go into building and sustaining community economies<sup>151</sup>. Gibson-Graham and other’s interest in becoming highlight the role affect – feelings of love and hate, joy and fear – play out in making and building community economies. They suggest we pay attention to our affective geographies, write of (what

can be) fleeting or “micro-political” ethical moments, and wonder where, who and how subjects become otherwise in making ethical economies.

My use of the apology as an entry point into the E-PAZ’s development is an example of using psychoanalytical material to explore a story of becoming; in other words, an account of what Gibson-Graham call the “work of stitching”<sup>152</sup>. I am not alone in turning to psychoanalytic theory for interpretive insight into thinking and cultivating postcapitalist subjects, or to explore what economy has to do with subjectivity. Articles published by members of the Subjects of Economy reading group (see Özselçuk and Madra 2005; Graham and Amariglio 2006 for an editorial introduction; and Özselçuk 2006) assert new and revised analytical relations between Marxism and psychoanalysis, and represent a move beyond discourse analysis. Graham and Amariglio put it nicely when they write that a turn to “psychoanalysis offers an existing ‘way in’ to the complexities of the subject and subjectivity” (2006, 202)<sup>153</sup>. Despite the interest and recognized importance of the subject and questions of becoming in postcapitalist literature (Byrne and Healy 2006; Graham and Amariglio 2006; Özselçuk and Madra 2005; Özselçuk 2006), most research focuses on individuals and their relation to otherwise economies and economic selves. This means there is an absence of work exploring questions of group formation or change. My chapter addresses this gap.

I do not, however, tackle what is a vast literature on group psychology. Instead, I turn to the work of Deborah Britzman whose cross-disciplinary work joins group psychology with questions of education and learning. Britzman’s work allows me to approach the question of becoming cooperative as a problem of learning and education rather than technical mastery or knowledge (a distinction I will return to shortly). I draw

on Britzman specifically because she has sought to push psychoanalysis to develop its theory of learning (2009) and has explored what psychoanalytic thought can add to thinking and theorizing about teaching and learning. Her work, for example, has pressed educators and educational theorists to consider not-learning and all the difficulties that circulate in classrooms, in coming to terms with one's education and its aftermaths (2003, 2006, 2009, 2011). A leitmotif of her work is the trouble made by what she describes as "the very thought of education" – a trouble that confronts educators and students, administrators and psychoanalysts. This trouble, she suggests, makes us nervous about education because of "two related difficulties":

"One difficulty is with opening the definition of education to include events that resist but nonetheless shape education, such as not learning, ignorance, aggression, and even phantasies"; the other, "concerns trying to know the outside world."  
(2003, 8)

These two difficulties make education "a drama that stages the play between reality and phantasy" (2003, 9), and (sometimes) can only be known, perhaps only provisional, in the aftermaths of education – in its reconstruction via story-telling and free association. Such methods may draw on fragments, and risk reading too much or too little into social relations between the learner and the world, the teacher and the institutions that teach them, or between the teacher and learner. Drawing on and inspired by Britzman, this chapter offers an explication of "the apology" as it so dramatically-mundanelly played a role in the fledgling E-PAZ Cooperative.

Approaching the question of becoming cooperative as a problem of learning and education (from a psychoanalytical perspective) – may be contrasted with the way the difficulties of "becoming cooperative" were figured within the Cooperative as a problem

(1) because some people did not know the “rules” (for example, the practices of formal consensus), or (2) were the result of “theory / practice” misunderstandings or disagreements within the Cooperative, or (3) equated “becoming cooperative” with “forming a cooperative”. Each of these interpretations is examined in this chapter, given their currency within the Cooperative. That said, all three explanations are common in the cooperative world, which tends to focus on cooperative development (e.g. “How to set up a cooperative”) and promotion (“What is a cooperative?”). This chapter does not assume that subjects (people) “become cooperative” simply by forming a cooperative. My interest in becoming cooperative is interested in (re)constructing the emotional relating (sometimes, lack thereof) and context that was signaled by the apology (drawing on Britzman 2006, 160). Understanding what could be called the emotional background of the apology help us analyze the series of fantasies and (mis)understandings of what it is to be cooperative – in other words, the mistakes of the Cooperative noted earlier.

Psychoanalytic explorations of education suggest learning is difficult not just because the subject matter may be difficult but because, for a variety of reasons, students can resist and find pleasure in refusing to learn (for case studies, see Britzman 2003, 2006, 2009). These explorations suggest flights from reality are a reasonable, if questionable, response to the panic that arises from uncertainty and uncertain knowledge (Britzman).

This chapter stages a return to the transcript where myself and another E-PAZ member “discovered” the apology and mocked it. I figure this piece of text as a rich analytic fragment from which I make what Freud called “psycho-analytic observations” (1975), which can be notations of seemingly senseless but meaningful emotive states and

actions. Famous examples are slips of the tongue, forgetfulness, or defensiveness. The apology, as a kind of tic, fits here too given that, in lay terms, it was an “un-self-conscious” act that upon notice was “revealed” as strange.

Importantly – although this should be clear as we proceed – I do not write in this chapter about one specific apology and the circumstances of its utterance. Instead, I am interested in the culture (and its many, many practices) that triggered the apology. This does not mean I ignore specific events; but it does mean that I do not attempt a one-to-one match between stressful event and apology. That would be impossible on many fronts anyway: stressful situations and the apology were everywhere<sup>154</sup>.

In constructing an account, my task as an analyst is to investigate the social, political and emotional geography of the group. Methodologically, this is a daunting task. An analysis of the apology is quite difficult; first, because as I noted, it was a frequent act; and second, because although I can remember being the person apologizing on numerous occasions or being apologized to (including phone calls after meetings), the details of each and every apology escapes me. For example, I remember standing on my street breathless from a brisk 40 minute walk home from a disastrous meeting and talking on my cell phone debriefing with a fellow participant. But what precise incident led to the call? What gesture? It is not simply that the apologies were unrecorded; they tended to escape notice (which is why I describe them as a psycho-analytic observation above), and the details around them disappeared – much like how the details of a vivid dream can be forgotten. Funny enough, something similar is happening in the transcript between *B* and *I*. Here we are recalling an instance of the apology that had happened just a few days before our recorded conversation:

“For example, there was a meeting [...] you facilitated and afterwards – a few days later, we contacted each other and we were both apologizing to each other [for whatever shitiness had happened at the meeting].” (bracketed material in original, *E-Zine*, 18)

Spoken in past perfect tense, our description of the apology is cased in generalities and rendered indistinct in terms of when this particular apology took place. From the point of view of psychoanalysis, this is interesting because our “discovery” and mocking of the apology is of course the mocking of a specific apology – without citing any of its specifics. Speaking of “it” as an event without details creates dissonance between our naming of a distinct apology and the timelessness we attribute to it. That is, although our words speak of *an* apology, the rendering of tenses and generalities speak to the cultural or group psychological fact that the apology was “a thing”. This is not to say that the details of the event leading to the apology we were mocking weren’t important; but our mocking belies an important point: we were speaking of “the apology” via “an apology” (the one that happened at the meeting prior). What we were naming then was that “the apology” existed as a thing – a cultural thing. This chapter seeks not to give an account of a collection of, say, recorded apologies; but an account of what made the constant apologizing possible, and perhaps, necessary. This is what makes it an account of *the* apology, not *an* apology.

## Setting

Let’s recall that the empirical material of this chapter is from an already-alternative community economy, grounded in relation to the Parecon worker cooperatives and alternative organizations that reside within the E-PAZ, and in the “cooperative world” in the city<sup>155</sup>. Much like the people with whom Gibson-Graham worked, members of the E-



PAZ often describe themselves as victims and / or survivors of the (capitalist) economy – complaints that often arise during moments of despair. This self-representation as a victim of the economy is, however, attenuated somewhat by a belief that cooperatives sit outside, beside or are a beacon beyond the mainstream capitalist economy<sup>156</sup>. The difference of note between those involved in Gibson-Graham’s action research projects and this work is that for those involved in the formation of the E-PAZ (already members of alternative economic and social / political projects), the “newness” of experiencing a different relation to the economy was not all new. Unlike the retrenched worker (who claims to be certain that the capitalist economy is oppressing them), cooperative members, broadly speaking, find and describe themselves in a rather murky zone: safely outside the “real” capitalist economy and at the same time regulated by it.

Despite claims of being regulated and subject to the capitalist economy – the claim that cooperatives are the “real deal” of an alternative to (capitalist) economy predominates. Reflecting on this self-talk, one interviewee described claims to alterity as “the lure of a correct line”. Such a “correct line” results in what I describe below as the celebration of form, that is, a focus on incorporation (“cooperatives”) versus a focus on being / becoming cooperative<sup>157</sup>. As he described it, the assumption at work in “the correct line” is that forming a cooperative results in the (automatic) formation of cooperative subjects. I draw attention to the celebration of form in this chapter because it is an important cultural component of the E-PAZ, where individuals and organizations are interested in and believe in cooperatives. They want “something else” in terms of otherwise economies and employment, and they are knowledgeable that “other

possibilities” are out there and nearby<sup>158</sup>. Their political geography permeates much of what we’ll see below.

### **Cooperatives, decision-making, “getting along” and other things**

“Are you okay?”

“I’m okay.”

“Okay, are we going to be okay?”

[*Laughter*]

In this section I describe the way the E-PAZ made decisions and attempted to do so using a method known as formal consensus. The section provides some backstory of the incorporation process, exposing some of the preexisting tenant group dynamics and their development during the two years leading up to the purchase of the building. I also explain the idealization of the cooperative form as it was manifested at the E-PAZ.

The cooperative was structured “federation style” (E-PAZ lingo), meaning that each organization (potential member and tenant group) nominated a representative (henceforth: “reps”) to the Co-op board. Reps were responsible for discussing issues and proposals with their group, and bringing back any concerns, modifications, or alternative proposals to the board. Proposals and decisions could be made at meetings, but a ratification process was instituted so that even if a decision was made at the board level, each group had one week in which they could “block” the decision from going forward, allowing each group’s members a chance to engage in a given issue or consideration. In these ways, the E-PAZ decision-making process allowed for a small number of people to attend board meetings while still upholding the promise that everyone could be involved in decisions affecting the building as a whole<sup>159</sup>.

All decisions were made by formal consensus, a procedure or method of arriving at decisions that plays a large role in this story of becoming cooperative<sup>160</sup>. (Indeed, how we took up and practiced formal consensus at the E-PAZ was a huge obstacle to doing the work of stitching, as we'll see.) The method of decision-making is outlined in *On Conflict and Consensus: A Handbook on Formal Consensus Decision-making* (Butler and Rothstein 1991). I draw on this resource here specifically because it was the handbook circulated at the E-PAZ.

The idea behind formal consensus is fairly straightforward: “It provides a foundation, structure, and collection of techniques for efficient and productive group discussions” (Butler and Rothstein 1991, 36), offering a venue in which everyone can participate in the making and shaping of decisions. As the writers / editors of the *Handbook* write, as a form and process of decision-making, formal consensus takes practice to learn and “must be defined by the group using it” (36). (Later, I describe some of the ways E-PAZ members tended not to heed this advice.) Despite these caveats by the *Handbook*'s authors, a critical evaluation of formal consensus would point out the ways in which the processes of formal consensus rely on the belief that communication is and can be straight-forward – a simple give-and-take, as if members of a group are mere transmission senders and receivers. This inherent rationalism was often asserted in practice at the E-PAZ. In addition, it was often expected that communication should not be encumbered with emotion or passion. If formal consensus suffers from an inherent rationalism, the common dictate at the E-PAZ that all arguments could and *should* be rational often meant that formal consensus at the E-PAZ suffered from hyper-rationalism.

What if we take the use and belief in the procedures of formal consensus to be our working curriculum of learning to be cooperative? Certainly, when I first arrived at the E-PAZ meetings to discuss forming a cooperative, it was the *Handbook On Formal Consensus* that was passed to me so that I might learn about its methods, its cues, and its hand-gestures. In this way, the *Handbook* and its use by the Co-op stand as something of an exemplar of its theory of cooperative learning. Notable about its use is that other than a technical explanation of its various gestures – “thumbs” for signaling consensus; “wiggling figures” for agreeing with a speaker – and ways of going forward, there was never discussion or debate of its underlying assumptions<sup>161</sup>. Only what was proper.

Two reasons were noted at meetings as to why no time was given to discussing the theoretical assumptions behind formal consensus and how it was practiced at the E-PAZ. First, theoretical discussion in the context of hours of what was deemed immediate pragmatic discussion was considered too much for the group<sup>162</sup>. Second, most, if not the majority, of individuals from groups gathered to form the cooperative used formal consensus in decision-making within their home organizations, meaning that most of the individuals present were already familiar with its standard methods.

While both reasons are reasonable, they are not without their shortcomings. For example, assuming most groups in the building used formal consensus in their decision-making ignored the fact that how the method was employed – its performance – could vary widely. It also assumed that within home groups, individual members had had time to digest and discuss assumptions embedded in the ideas behind formal consensus. Incidentally, one of my interviewees who had worked at one of the worker cooperatives noted that one of his disappointments in working within its Parecon space was there was

almost no in-depth discussion of Parecon, or with it, the method of decision-making, even though both are often cited as central to the operation of this worker co-op – a fact that not only disappointed him, but surprised him as well (interview).

Taking my cue from Deborah Britzman, it may be safe to say that the E-PAZ's cooperative theory of learning was under-theorized: left to chance and learning by doing<sup>163</sup>. Like all such naturalist and experiential approaches to learning, what theory there was assumed that the transmission of knowledge is straight-forward: rules and principles can be learned by rote then understood and practiced. There was the truism that students encounter ideas about cooperatives and cooperation as empty vessels, open and ready for learning. (In which case, becoming cooperative is instantaneous.) And, perhaps most seriously, a utopic belief that that cooperatives are idyllic places without conflict (drawing on Britzman 2003, 2009). At the E-PAZ, the way these ideas played out was that the *Handbook* was left to stand on its own: as if to educate without interpretation.

Although formal consensus and the federation style of the E-PAZ's decision-making process allowed for all interested in participating and weighing-in on decisions being made, it was arduous (to say the least!). For one thing, because so many of the decisions were, in effect, virtual, even though reps were present and representing their group's interest at a meeting, how (or if) options and their implications were discussed among the smaller groups was always a great unknown. Perhaps because of the length of time between when proposals would be passed by the board and go to ratification within the federation, the board was often stuck in a holding pattern, either literally unable to move forward *or* feeling that way.

“Feeling” unable to move forward should not be underestimated, because of course, “feeling”, in this sense, is a case where what is real and what is perceived is unknown and difficult to discern. On the whole, given the time-arduous structure of the decision-making process, there was some desire to find expediency at the board level. One of the dynamics that emerged to address the desire for some expediency was the (largely unspoken) imperative for everyone to get along. As an injunction, this desire spoke to the wish for quick, productive and non-emotionally draining meetings. The second dynamic (as put by one individual) was the feeling that there existed “things unsaid” among the group. This was only a suspicion, which may or may not have been justified, and why that might be the case was, again, hard to discern. Was it simply a matter of people not being able to make meetings? Being “bad communicators”? Being over-committed and therefore lacking the time and energy? These were open questions without answers.

Although such factors were, at times, noted, the feeling persisted. It felt, sometimes, that only some people were “in the know” about what was happening and what the next steps were; or maybe it was that some people or groups were withholding information<sup>164</sup>. Not that “withholding information” was assumed to be necessarily intended or callous. Sometimes, for instance, one person tasked to research a topic or find out information from, say, the land titles office, was not able to attend the next meeting, and might forget to inform the group what they found out. Alternatively, who was responsible for doing a task might not have been assigned, or even if it had, the person assigned might not have been able to complete it<sup>165</sup>. What was often a lack of information was clearly also a lack of communication among the group, perhaps the result of relying exclusively on

volunteer labour. Trust, as a result, was sometimes in short supply. The desire for expediency, via the imperative to “get along”, was quite understandably, a go-to antidote.

### **Frayed edges**

“Are you okay?”

“I’m okay.”

“Okay, are we going to be okay?”

[*Laughter*]

I often heard and joined in complaining about the injunction “to get along” in social circles with E-PAZ friends outside of formal meetings. What for the purpose of explication I’ll call “the social group” was not a clique of regulars (i.e. a group with members) but a loose group of activists and workers involved in the building project who were friends outside the space – largely, it seemed to me, because they lived in the same low-rent area. “The social group” was made up of a lot of talk about the problems related to incorporating and becoming cooperative – including the dynamics listed above – were regular topics of conversation at social gatherings<sup>166</sup>. This was important, perhaps necessary, for working through the content of these dynamics. Yet while there was much to say, there were barriers to bringing these reflections and analysis to the larger group. We [the social group] did not – could not – bring the analysis generated in what effectively were small group discussions to the formal decision space<sup>167</sup>, a fact that will be important to know for later<sup>168</sup>. For how could what were “social groups” present their “findings” and ideas without admitting to (what could be construed) as talking (badly) about others?

Moreover, we [the social group] could not very well show up at a board meeting to discuss “topics”: Meetings were for proposals! Decisions! (as we were often reminded by

those who did not think discussion of theory or meaning was a good use of time – and in fact, a waste of time.) In any case, in retrospect, I think the other problem was we did not know how to raise some of the issues well – cased, as they were, as grievances against specific people. Or tongue-tied with words like “institutional sexism” or with vague references to capitalism: mighty concepts we were unable to filter our particularities through. For those of us troubled by the injunction to “get along” (one we held ourselves to), we only knew how to accuse. We didn’t know how to hold people accountable without condemning them. Nor did we know how to question our structure or use of formal consensus, as will be explained further, below. The two were often connected, as there were multiple incidences where a man would tell a woman that she was getting “too emotional”. (One man, multiple woman.) The social group (not all women) might have an analysis of this, but “we” couldn’t make it a productive one in the meetings.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m okay.”

“Okay, are we going to be okay?”

[*Laughter*]

The philosopher Jacques Rancière can help us understand the idealization of the cooperative form at the E-PAZ and the trouble members faced in practicing participatory democracy. Rancière argues contemporary democratic cultures exert a hatred towards democracy, suggesting mainstream notions of what democracy looks like (agreement, congeniality) are actually very much off the mark and detrimental to any democratic project (2006). In this way, his work can help tackle the implied imperative to “get along”. Rancière reminds us that democracy cannot be democracy without disagreement. Indeed, Rancière argues that there is an integral role for disagreement rather than agreement in democracy, a role that is too often degraded or actively dismissed (1999,



2006). Building on Rancière, I argue against the focus on the cooperative form, and what amounted to the almost exclusive focus on the technical aspects of formal consensus, which he would suggest only works to forestall or avoid politics. Rancière might say that focused on correct procedures, proper protocols and the like, members of the E-PAZ unwittingly diminished politics by mistaking politics for technical mastery.

When the E-PAZ collective was in its formation stage, it chose to prioritize the task of (cooperative) form – the kind of governance structure and decision-making process it would use. These tasks it deemed “practical” – over and above those it deemed “theoretical” (more on this below), the latter concerning in-depth discussion of shared understanding of what “formal consensus” looks like, for example. In this, they could be said to have mistaken politics for what Rancière would describe as “merely” a social task, with its important functional considerations (for example, time to attend meetings, processes to include the perspectives of a broad “E-PAZ community”)(drawing on Rancière 2007, 11). Likewise, the spoken and unspoken insistence “to get along” was what Rancière calls a pacifying procedure. Only politics, he reminds us, is based in disagreement; social management on the other hand revolves around procedures aimed at “pacifying” disagreement (2007, 11).

In an era that trumps the ascendance of (liberal) democracy, which Rancière argues, exudes not democracy’s success but its demise insofar as the “democracy” trumpeted is opposed to politics (it cannot tolerate disagreement), I suggest we view the avoidance (and repression) of disagreement within cooperatives as problematic. That is, detrimental to the promise of the form (its principles) and its possible role in building alternative / noncapitalist economies. Such a celebration focuses on, for the lack of a better phrase, the

finished product, potentially shuffling aside the processual character of working with and among others, of pooling ideas and arguing over what to do next, what to do now, and questions of how we (might) come to make decisions together. That is, this celebratory mode ignores the very difficulties inherent in democracy, of working together, and of building and sustaining community economies. These difficulties and overcoming them are what Gibson-Graham refer to as “the work of stitching”.

“Are you okay?”  
“I’m okay.”  
“Okay, are we going to be okay?”  
[*Laughter*]

For some at the E-PAZ however (notably, the few women involved as well as folks from the political organizations), the idealization of (Paracon worker) cooperatives, the organization and ideals of which informed the E-PAZ Co-op, was critiqued, largely in private settings, for the unrecognized gap between incorporating as a co-op and acting cooperatively. There was a difference to be made, some said (again, in private settings), between being fully concerned with institution-building versus forcing all of us to think about what the E-PAZ was and wanted to be (a question of what might unite the tenants). Those knowledgeable about incorporating cooperatives and self-designated experts on cooperative knowledge, who insisted that the practical tasks of incorporating was in essence the premier task, were dubbed in such settings “the co-op boys”<sup>169</sup>. The adage speaks to the gendered dynamics of the group (and a critique therein), but embedded in this critique was more content worth elaborating.

First, the dismissive nature of the phrase “co-op boys” was a critique of the idea that being cooperative (any institutionalization) could be straight-forward, based purely on straight-forward, rational decision-making and not involve any emotional content

whatsoever – all of which the co-op boys advocated. Starting a cooperative, in this sense, was all about the paperwork: incorporation and by-laws. It was technical, and there was a belief that technical mastery would beget democratic participation, as if democratic practice was akin to the output of a well-oiled machine. (This is precisely what Rancière calls social management.) The co-op boys believed in the cooperative principles (See Table 4), but they insisted that the way to accomplish them was via a “rational” (read: non-emotive) discussion and a focus on technical matters<sup>170</sup>. In this way, the critique of “the co-op boys” was a critique of the formal modes in which participatory democracy was said to be achieved<sup>171</sup>. Although the critique might have been warranted, as a social practice, it was also limited: in the most literal way, it was limited to social gatherings, talk in hallways, and chance meetings. Not, that is, in the formal decision space of the E-PAZ.

Again, Rancière is helpful for why (“chosen”) exclusion from our decision space was detrimental. Democracy, Rancière writes, “is the community of sharing, in both senses of the term: a membership in a single world which can only occur in conflict” (2007, 45)<sup>172</sup>. Rancière contrasts what he calls a “community of sharing” with a “community of consensus” (2007, 50), the former being a place of active disagreement and the latter being an assertion that democracy is simply (wrongly, Rancière suggests) a gathering of the like-minded. To enact equality requires that “individuals tear themselves out of the nether world of inarticulate sounds and assert themselves as sharers in a common world” (2007, 50).

Critics (myself included) complained about the drive to institutionalize and the ways that “non-practical” questions (Questions like “What is our basis of unity?” or

“How are we thinking about how to arrive at decisions through formal consensus?”) were sidelined in formal meetings. Yet we failed to force the issue *as* practical questions rather than as theoretical or abstract ones (which was how such questions were construed in meetings). In so doing, we were “conceding”, albeit reluctantly, to participate in what Rancière calls a “community of consensus”<sup>173</sup>. We were doing so because, in retrospect, we may not have had faith that some of the tenants / individuals involved could see beyond institutionalization, or a rationalist-based decision-making practice. Rancière is particularly pertinent when he suggests “The narrow path of emancipation passes between an acceptance of separate worlds and the illusion of consensus” (2007, 50). In other words, refusing to bring to the formal decision space our “dissensus”, the critics of the institutionalization of the E-PAZ were in effect asserting that “we” (the critics) were in a different world than the other tenants. Questioning the whispered demand to “get along” and the insisted upon injunction to not speak with emotion (“don’t get emotional!”) was not possible unless we brought these issues – and the “non-practical questions” they accompanied – to the formal decision space.

Rancière suggests there is an ascetics to politics that must be cultivated, one that asserts and believes in what he describes as “a virtue grounded in trust”: trust, for example, in what he calls “the notion of equality of intelligences” (2007, 51; see also, Rancière 1991), where, for instance, all can understand all, where words such as “equality” can be given meaning and interpretation that others can reasonably understand, debate and so on<sup>174</sup>. Even as we critiqued “the co-op boys” for their focus on form and rules, we would fail insofar as we kept our critique (largely) outside our formal meeting space, amongst ourselves<sup>175</sup>.

Rancière consistently questions the equivalence of mistaking legal-political texts – which in this case would be the E-PAZ’s incorporation papers and the processes of ratification – with enactments of democracy. Democracy is not the result of the former processes for decision-making but acts of dissensus.

What I have not yet noted explicitly is that both “paths to democracy” were present at the E-PAZ. On the one-hand, there was a desire – exerted strongly by “the co-op boys” and acceded to by all (if by the failure to speak), that the incorporation of the cooperative (its form) and its procedures (formal consensus) was enough to make the E-PAZ a place of participatory democracy. (This “path to democracy” is what Rancière rejects as a false or “police” notion of democracy.) Co-existing with this was the belief that all could govern the cooperative. This “place of sharing” (Rancière) was such that “expert” knowledge of cooperatives and with the procedures of formal consensus, including work experience within the worker cooperatives or the political / social organizations, was superseded by a call to argument, articulation and passionate politics. Importantly then, for the purpose of the complex story of formation and becoming cooperative that I want to tell, we need to be aware that these dynamics were ever present (if difficult to name and do something about). Indeed, it was not until this conflict was named as such that those interested in forming the cooperative could approach the question of becoming cooperative<sup>176</sup>.

### **Group psychology**

I want to relate the above to our transcript. As I have suggested, the apology and its particularities offers an instance in which to ponder learning to be cooperative and the process of becoming cooperative subjects. Exposing the apology – as a ridiculous and

over-done gesture – exposed what the apology-as-symptom was protecting: the fact of the group. Of course, as explained above, when I say we were protecting ourselves from difficult knowledge, this is not the same as saying we did not know what the problem(s) were. Let's explore this further.

If we consider the small social circle that I was (sometimes) privy to, discussion of the formation and future of the fledgling cooperative spilled into social spaces, took place at people's homes, in coffee houses, on the steps of the building and in bars. Even if social get-togethers were not designed to talk about "E-PAZ stuff", if more than two active participants were present, conversation seemed inevitably to go that way. Through hours of discussion in the aftermath of meetings, those of us (often women, largely those from political / social groups<sup>177</sup>), we would come to conclusions about the various problems of the group – the rationality and thus the structural exclusions inherent in formal consensus, for instance. We might talk about how a few people did not seem "on board" or interested in being a part of the group but instead wanted to rule, hold hostage, or destroy the group. Yet these conclusions could not seem to be reconciled with our (on-going fantasy?) of wanting everyone who had a long-term tenancy in the building to participate in building a new cooperative. So even though in the social spaces we could recognize that not everyone involved in the process of decision-making and cooperative formation was actually interested in *cooperative* membership, such facts were (curiously) separated from how "we" participated in board meetings. If it became easy after many months to pin-point – analytically – the problem (hostage-taking, sexism, non-participation), it was much more difficult to know what to do with such knowledge. As noted earlier, there was a certain helplessness of bringing non-practical concerns to the

board; and anyway, “we” only knew how to do so badly, in other words, through acts of blame or admonishment. With this in mind, it is possible to ask: was the apology a stand-in for this gap? An apology of the unsaid?

There certainly was a separation of knowledge at work, a separation not just confined to the inside and outside of official decision-making space. Our analytic pieces were kept apart – one piece being the stuff of what cooperation looks like and the practice of the principles of cooperatives; the other being a desire to include everyone in membership of the cooperative. Without being able to put these pieces together – to tolerate uncertainty and to let go of an ideal cooperative as the natural outcome of our sharing rent in the same building for many years, we were stranded / stranded ourselves. Another way of saying this is that it was as if we knew before we understood that when it comes to be(coming) cooperative only those interested in cooperation could become cooperative<sup>178</sup>. In Freudian terms, it was as if these facts were “pushed away by consciousness” (1975, 344), an effect mediated by and through the spaces in which conversation and decision-making were held and constituted. Or, as I noted earlier in the discussion about Rancière, there was no room to enter into a discussion about the (interpreted) rationality of formal consensus when “non-practical” questions were rejected as such, *and* accusations of some people (women) being “too emotional” was what spurred our talk to begin with. “Forgotten”, in this way, was of course not so much a literal forgetting as it was a combination of not knowing how or where to begin.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m okay.”

“Okay, are we going to be okay?”

[*Laughter*]

The difficulties of engaging in disagreement turns us from Rancière to the world of group psychology and inter-personal social relations, both of which consider questions such as how can we learn to tolerate disagreement? And how do we dare speak it? To put what is dangerous about disagreement in stark terms, I use the example of love and hate. To engage in disagreement is dangerous because to speak it means that we cannot always love our loved ones (our allies, friends, coworkers). It may also mean that even those whom we love to hate must be given a listening ear, a second chance, or even not remain the object of our hatred. At stake in this example is not a matter of prying hate and disagreement apart but recognizing that disagreement is (largely) impossible without the presence of affect, lest we reduce disagreement to logic and mechanical operations. To illustrate this, below I engage in psychoanalytic story-telling, which seeks to pull out conflict, examine (ir)rationalities and mine the “unsaid” for the difficult knowledge we would rather not know (Britzman). I draw on psychoanalysis in order that we might examine the above conflicts as the desire to *not know* of the conflict’s existence. This will allow me to lessen a focus on “anti-democratic” (i.e. the “co-op boys”) and “democratic” camps (our “social club”), thereby respecting that both “camps” were in error, and that neither “camp” was either exclusive or steadfast in their views.

To make Rancière’s general observations about the role of “hate” in enlivening democracy productive in this analysis, I turn to Deborah Britzman’s work on education and the role(s) of affect in the process of learning (or the process of learning to become cooperative) to aid us in this endeavor. As Britzman notes, expressing (non-clichéd forms of) love and hate is difficult. When it comes to the role of affect in education and becoming, she suggests, we might be well advised to “assume that the difficulties of these



matters elude certainty” (2006, 61)<sup>179</sup>. In other words, not only are some stories hard to tell, but how and why affect matters, circulates or is interpreted is itself a dangerous adventure.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m okay.”

“Okay, are we going to be okay?”

[*Laughter*]

As noted earlier, one of the most notable features of the apology was its utterance was after by the facilitator, a revolving role in the decision-making process. This is particularly interesting given that the procedures of formal consensus structurally place the facilitator in a power/less position. The facilitator’s job is to observe and keep the group on track<sup>180</sup>. The facilitator’s job is highly technical in that they must watch for agreement and disagreement, and draw out the disagreement, tracking verbal and non-verbal cues. They are the only person in the formal consensus process to withhold their opinions, whether in favor or against a particular way forward<sup>181</sup>. In these ways, the role of facilitator is a very different one from that of a board chair.

The incessant need to apologize in the aftermath of meetings was often explained by the group itself (and often by the individual facilitating) as a failure of knowing how to facilitate – of, say, lacking training in the procedures and art of formal consensus. Certainly, it was the case that some individuals had more or less experience, and more or less formal training in formal consensus, consensus-building, or conflict resolution than others, but the apology never seemed limited to any one person’s actual experience or training: the apology was, over and above the social positionality of those that uttered it, a free-for-all guilt-fest. It was an apology with a wide net – vague and for everything – rather than one that could name specific failures<sup>182</sup>.

Lastly, what seems particular to me about the apology – speaking here of the few times that I was its utterer – was just how compelled it felt. It was different and distinct from the kind of apologizing I do, for instance, as a Canadian subject. Even once critical of its gendered and problematic nature<sup>183</sup>, the apology seemed to usher itself forth. “Ensnared” in it, it was impossible not to apologize. It was sincere. Compulsory and heartfelt.

If the apology is viewed as a symptom – defined as psychical attempts “at self-cure, recovery, and protection” (Britzman 2006, 129) – the apology might be interpreted an attempt to cure the group of its dis-ease. Viewed in this way, the apology was a (however misguided) attempt to protect the group from uncomfortable knowledge: what we could call the “known and not spoken” and the “felt and not acknowledged”, reviewed above. The person apologizing attempted to protect the group by taking the guilt / failure / discomfort generated within (“amongst”?) the group as their personal responsibility, their personal failure. This was not an attempt or positionality of becoming a martyr, but rather an admission of being (privy to the) guilty party. By taking responsibility for the whole, the person apologizing was leaving the larger group “free” from acknowledging its shortcomings, sharing in failures or admitting our collective wrongs. In this way, when the apologee took and claimed responsibility for the group via apologizing, they were in effect attempting to sweep under the rug the fact of the group.

Of course we should ask why knowledge of the fact of the group would be so dangerous, and why we would (unconsciously) be keen to avoid it. I suggest our illness was the result of not knowing how to be cooperative and our failed attempt to recover from this condition via the procedures of formal consensus. The method of formal

consensus was supposed to allow us to become cooperative after all; but not only did formal consensus fail in making us cooperative, perhaps it could not achieve such a task. The urge to repeatedly apologize – the seeming compulsiveness of the apology – could be considered, in this way, an unconscious attempt to protect the group (and the self) from this very knowledge. In other words, we may have “known” that becoming cooperative was not about sameness (becoming each other, getting along), nor achievable through rational means in a straight-forward fashion, but we did not want to know this either.

Britzman would call this “difficult knowledge”, or the desire to not know (2003, 2006, 2009, 2011). It was difficult to admit that despite our education in procedures of formal consensus and a politics that promote formal consensus, we did not know how to practice it. To admit as much was dangerous because “we” (the E-PAZ) were the (supposed) self-deigned experts no less<sup>184</sup>! If the experts had trouble practicing what they preached, that threatened the fantasy of cooperatives and the primacy of democratic decision-making within them as the “real deal” of alternative economies. The desire to not know was compelling and strong for such reasons. Protected by the apology was our narcissism (as “experts”) and a fantasy for an idyllic (community) economy.

If we return to the transcript again, we can note what is perhaps the most obvious thing about it: the apology is presented as a joke – a thing of ridicule, a thing to ridicule. *B* and I are mocking the apology – and aping ourselves. Indeed, mocking the apology was intense, enjoyable, and cathartic. A joke, Freud once suggested, is “the most social of all the mental functions that aim at a yield of pleasure” (Freud 1991, 238). By this, he suggested that the psychic release accompanying the making and telling of jokes stemmed from its social embeddedness. In his accompanying analysis, which was

concerned to provide a technical interpretation on how jokes worked, Freud noted that a joke often “requires the participation of someone else [“someone” not present] in the mental process” (238). Many jokes are funny precisely because of their “social” or “political” context (i.e. not just their content). In other words, a joke is funny because it “includes” another “absent” audience member; an absent audience member whom the teller and receiver of the joke know is present<sup>185</sup>. The voice recorder stood in for this “absent audience member”. Although we (*B* and *I*) are mocking of ourselves, our aping is not merely directed at ourselves, but at the group (those attending meetings organizing the new Co-op), the membership and the larger community – presumably, the readers of the interview and its ideals. The occasion of such mocking was an outcome of prior (sincere) apologizing and the result of working through the material of our formation and the process of becoming cooperative.

The apology is important because it named (without naming) a problem within the fledgling group: a “symptom” of the facilitator (or another lone member) taking responsibility for the group as a whole. This symptom was a kind of group fantasy, a fantasy that desired to deny the group as a group. In this way, I suggest the mocking can be (re)interpreted as an instance where this fantasy was being worked through – not simply by the two people making the joke, but (although later) “by” the larger public to whom it was addressed (i.e. the E-PAZ community). Calling attention to the apology in this way called the compulsive apology into question: it allowed the question to be asked “Why are *you* apologizing?” and only later, “What is the responsibility of the group?”

### **A matter of consensus (and becoming “what?”)**

It is hard to appreciate the overcoming of the apology without further context of course. The following story is an illustration of what could be called our overly literal reading of the rules of formal consensus, while also offering a glimpse into the moment where we learned the difference between being a “natural member” of the cooperative (due to prior tenancy, recall) and being cooperative. Telling it will require additional backstory.

There was one long-standing tenant in the building, a worker cooperative, who had been active in the early days of the formation of the cooperative. The worker cooperative had had a role in determining the cooperative type we would adopt, our decision-making process and structure, and they were present for our early discussions on rent (see Chapter 2) for example. The rep from this cooperative changed and the current representative, after disappearing for many months, reappeared in late summer 2011, just when we were trying to solidify and move forward with the purchase of the building. At the time, after initial talks with the credit union, we were discussing some of the stipulations they had before they would consider a mortgage. The big one was the credit union insisted that each member act as a guarantor. The new rep came to block all discussion to question the veracity of the cooperative buying the building. Guarantorship was a concern for this member (as well as other members) because within his worker co-op, he was personally liable if his co-op failed financially. Thus, if it came to pass that the credit union had to force the E-PAZ Co-op into foreclosure, the member-tenant and by extension individual guarantors of that tenant would be on the line financially. (The situation was slightly different for the social or political organizations – only some of

which were incorporated – creating a level of protection to individuals’ personal wealth<sup>186</sup>.) This was a valid concern, and shared by many, but that he “showed up” with a go-to alternative (see below), is what I wish to examine.

In any case, after much group research and analysis of what being a guarantor on the mortgage meant and when or why it would be relevant, the group (and eventually, the other worker cooperatives) realized that any issue was rather moot, largely because the mortgage fell below the market value of the building, far outstripping the assets of any of the worker cooperatives or any of their individual workers. As others noted, if a foreclosure situation arose, the credit union would not necessarily recoup much of its money from the worker cooperatives or their workers (since they were all relatively “asset poor”) anyway – the building was actually the most valuable asset; meaning the guarantorships were little more than a formality. But as the dissenting member insisted, the technical (legal) risk was there, and he and his worker co-op, were unwilling to take that risk. He forwarded an alternative proposal – another way of purchasing the building which, to his mind, would isolate the risk to individual organizations and individuals. This would be to abandon the cooperative form in favor of what he described as a “condo-like” purchase<sup>187</sup>.

The dictates of formal consensus demanded that we take this member’s concerns as well as his potential solution seriously. That is, despite the fact that we came together under the auspices of starting a cooperative to buy and manage the building; there had been months of research into the kind and structure of the cooperative; and we were now far enough along in our efforts to be in discussion with the credit union to provide

financing, as a rule, we had to entertain his suggestion that we should buy the building as a commercial condo.

Multiple meetings around the issue of guarantorship and the condo idea were held. There was a need for multiple meetings because each meeting either went nowhere (no decision could be made, one way or another) and because, each time, there was a call to gather more information. As well, the group wanted everyone to be clear about what guarantorship entailed, its risks, and how the risks were (or were not) different for the business and non-business member groups. Through each round of sorting through our research, the dissenter remained unsatisfied. Most of the other (business group) members on the other hand, slowly became satisfied that the risk involved was worth it, mitigated as it was by the large asset that would be recouped by the credit union if we were forced into foreclosure.

Perhaps pondering the risk posed by guarantorship, some members of the group suggested that risk could only be mitigated by what the group termed economic solidarity – a call to trust that the members would “step up” – hold fund-raisers, raise their own rents – in times of crisis (say, a short-fall in revenues). What was talked through here were the ways that the care of the space – from fund-raising, meeting, cleaning, leasing, and so on – were indeed economic contributions and “assets” to the Cooperative. That is, contributions to the Cooperative and assets of its members were stretched beyond those that the credit union saw or accepted as real<sup>188</sup>. The question became: should we take up what the credit union recognized as real and *could* we, at least internally, value the contributions of our (prospective) members – including the non-businesses? What was particularly interesting about such conversation was that although the credit union

presented us with an issue that asserted a business / non-business dualism (a dualism we had in fact struggled with at the beginning of our formation), our verbal accounting of contributions and assets to the Cooperative blurred “us” / “them”. Our conversation cited not just the contributions by the political / social groups, but those equally “off the books” contributions and assets by some of the businesses: opening their space to use for fundraisers, cleaning areas of the building were not technically in their leasehold, and so on. What we found in our conversations about economic solidarity was simply that each group contributed a variety of goods and services to the Cooperative. In the articulation of the (majority) of the group, these were “assets” without which the Cooperative could not survive. The notion of economic solidarity – not so much an abstract definition but a verbal accounting of practices and promises – was suggested as a mitigation of the perceived and real risks of buying a building together *and* working within-while-outside the terms that were being imposed on us by the credit union. Although immensely practical, this articulation was also “theoretical”, since it included defining terms and discussing ideas. In our conversation we learned economic solidarity is a great intangible: real and linked to so many practices, yet ephemeral. Was it enough? Would it do? For most, the answer was yes.

For the dissenter – the member rep that brought to the meeting what became known as “the condo idea” – it was not. After much coaxing by the group to articulate his position, he said he did not believe all the would-be and declared members of the Cooperative understood or took the purchase “seriously”. Questioned as to what he meant by this, his explanation for what he desired (a commercial condo) came down to not



trusting that the other members would see the purchase as a long-term project; as potentially affecting people's livelihoods.

We were at a stand-off of sorts. Every member was on board and willing to accept the uneven risks of purchase but the group could not move forward. We were stymied – left considering how and in what ways we could possibly come to consensus on the purchase via a cooperative. More meetings and the dissenter's proposal was again up for consideration, despite his articulation that he did not trust the rest of the “us” that made up the Cooperative. There the group was: ready and willing to consider the condo-idea. The reasoning was they *had to* because of the “rules” of formal consensus.

Then, at what may have been the fourth or fifth meeting on this specific topic, someone asked (at a very out-of-the-blue-moment) “Why are we having this conversation?” The question, certainly said with some derision, was also uncanny: Why *were* we having this conversation? With frustration, someone then claimed that the proposal “put us back a year and a half”. And another piped up to suggest that the very proposal was contrary to the Cooperative's express purpose. Where, in one moment, most of the group was ready and willing to take up the dissenter's proposal as per the “rules of formal consensus”; in another – it was a “doh!” moment – the consideration of the proposal could not be taken up and made no sense at all. The spell of formal consensus as “all and any proposal” (that is, a to-the-letter technical reading of formal consensus) was broken. The proposal put forward by the dissenter was questionable. It no longer mattered if the condo idea was a good one or not; individual reps recalled that we had in fact spent many months discussing the various institutional forms through which the tenants could

buy the building. It was that the decision had already been made: “we” wanted to form a cooperative (which we did), and together, “we” wanted to purchase the building.

I want to explain why such a moment was not only important, but provides us with an example of becoming cooperative – as well as an example of overcoming the overly technical use of formal consensus that I described earlier. For if the dissenter’s proposal no longer made any sense – it was recognized as unintelligible – birthed in the process of this realization and our articulation of what we understood to be the concept of economic solidarity, a new question had to be asked: “Do you, does your group, want to be a member of the Cooperative?” This is a simple question, yet previously it was one that had not been asked directly.

Other than a reminder that we had already made decisions about what formation we would take, there was something else of importance being articulated. This new question was not just asked to the dissenter and the group he represented but to every group. It was no longer obvious that “the participants” would be the natural members of the Co-op. All the groups had to choose to be members. A member group would have to want to be a member, would have to want to purchase the building with the cooperative and such a decision meant trusting the other members in such an endeavour<sup>189</sup>. In that way it was a reiteration of economic solidarity.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter is not an attempt to tell the full story of the E-PAZ’s formation, a journey taking over two years. Instead, it offers was an interpretive narrative of the bumpy road members of the E-PAZ Cooperative took to learn the difference between being incorporated as a cooperative and becoming cooperative. This allowed us to

explore questions of becoming within a specific context. It was not a straight-forward process by any means, and my narrative reflects this.

Britzman suggests that education “flounders” when “it mindlessly repeats idealizations of cooperative learning, role models, and socialization” (2011, 117). Her description of the idealization of education is akin to the idealization of cooperative form at the expense of attention to being cooperative described in the chapter. Like dominant education’s view of itself, where learning and learning in groups is conceived as “happy” or the site of innocence (a “safe space”) or a place for open-book learning, predominate cooperative views of itself, including that of the fledging E-PAZ Co-op, proclaim the successful living of its principles. This may be a common enough assumption, but put into context where the cooperative form is fetishized, i.e., where cooperatives “promise” an oasis from the difficulties and violence of (supposed) non-democratic workplaces and hierarchical social relations, it may be particularly devastating if cooperatives cannot live up to such a (self-)image<sup>190</sup>. Is it any wonder then that the emotions circulating in the building, in board meetings and indeed at social gatherings were so heightened (if disavowed)?

The apology stopped. It stopped when other questions were asked like the one “Do you want to be a member of the cooperative?”; and when other models of unity were articulated, such as the discussion economic solidarity and its accounting<sup>191</sup>. In Rancière’s sense of equality: everyone could engage these issues, these questions, and no one was “on trial”, whether for being too emotional, too technical, intentionally or unintentionally sexist or too rational. The overcoming of the apology was productive of being cooperative in a way that the many verbal and non-verbal, said and unsaid

“arguments” about the basis, theories and use of procedures of formal consensus could not be. In a psychoanalytical sense, the apology stopped when we recognized it as a cover-up: for our fantasies about being “already all-knowing” about cooperatives and being cooperative; and for the simple mistake that all tenants would desire membership in the cooperative. It was only then that the apology could be recognized and mocked as one (among many) reasonable if ultimately unhelpful gestures.

But overcoming the apology was one stitch in the members of the E-PAZ Cooperative efforts towards becoming cooperative. This stitch was complex, and it was so because E-PAZ members had to wrestle with their on-going fantasies about cooperatives, and their assumptions going into the formation of the cooperative that tenants in the building were the “natural” members of the cooperative. If this chapter offers an account of the successful formation not just of a cooperative, but of cooperative *subjects*, we might notice the important turning point of giving up hatred towards one possible object (“the dissenter”), or love towards a treasured ideal (formal consensus) and the redirection of love and hate elsewhere. There, each individual and member group was and became subject to difficult questions, surprising facts, and a confrontation with risk.

We thought we had done our homework on what kind of cooperative would fit with the purchase and operation of the building, for example. We had spent months debating what kind of cooperative would make sense for the E-PAZ, and how our decision-making structure would function. But our homework did not include an “us” as a group that had to be cultivated into a new becoming. As our use of formal consensus illustrates, “procedures cannot help us without our feelings” (Britzman 2006, 168). It was our feelings that had to become if not acceptable (they always cause trouble), then tolerable

to a degree that they were not repressed or displaced onto the facilitator to attempt a cure through apology. The concept of economic solidarity was an expression of “us” overflowing with “feelings”: the fear of economic uncertainty, inadequacy, and confusion with regard to fiscal knowledge (“the guarantorship”), and accounting of gifts and non-monetary contributions.

The empirical material presented in this chapter illustrates some of the follies involved in taking knowledge of cooperatives (principles, incorporation procedures) as equivalent to knowledge of becoming cooperative. My argument moves the discussion of cooperatives beyond a focus on its institutional or governmental form to a discussion of subjectification; in other words, the making and becoming of human subjects. In so doing, I challenge the popular (non-academic) views that it is the form alone that make cooperatives cooperatives and that the tensions that arise within cooperatives, to cite one grand explanation I have heard, are the result of the ill-effects of living within and / or being a survivor of capitalist economy. In broad strokes then, the chapter offered an argument as to why cooperative communities should concern themselves with cooperative subjecthood and not simply with cooperative membership. As I argued, being / becoming cooperative does not necessarily arise out of a cooperative structure<sup>192</sup>: because structure alone cannot do the more messy and often more difficult work of seeking social relations with others. Only in such seeking can we enliven cooperative principles of justice, equity and reciprocity.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a “care of the us”, or the becoming of cooperation at the E-PAZ, involved revisiting not our technical formation (that we were prior tenants in the building) but extending this technicality into what was a new beginning and new

relations. It did not mean agreement and it certainly did not mean letting anyone off from questions hard to answer, and even harder to ask. The making of the cooperative “us” was funny – poetic, absurd, uncanny and silly too. We might have paused to ask “What just happened to us?” Instead, we moved onto other questions, more research, more decisions.

## Chapter 5: Encountering workfare

A key feature of the postcapitalist politics Gibson-Graham describes is hope. Hope, in the sense they use it, is an invitation to the new, the unthought, and untried. Their work argues that we need new ways of seeing, thinking and acting that aim to “imagine and inhabit a world of economic possibility” (2006, ix). I’m going to call this aspect of their politics “positive thinking”. Elaborating, Gibson-Graham also mark a distinction between focusing on the “conditions of possibility” from the “limits on” possibly (1996, xxv): focusing on the latter, they suggest, is already ready to draw the border between what’s possible and what’s not.

Gibson-Graham’s particular brand of positive thinking can get under people’s skins, as they report in the new introduction to the re-issue of *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*. They note that some critics suggest that in looking for and highlighting economic possibilities Gibson-Graham are not “giving enough time to the downside of economic life” (1996, supra note 23 at xxxi). Other critics say that in focusing on community and noncapitalist economies they fail to see (and willfully ignore) “the big picture”; that is, the wrath of destruction wrought by global capitalism.

As much as writing a thesis in conversation with Gibson-Graham means that in a very big way, I am “a fan” of their work, perhaps five chapters in is a good time to admit that I find some of their tactics challenging. Intellectually and emotionally. Politically. I often come up short against “positive thinking”. This is what I like about the nerve-grating phrase “positive thinking”: It helps me keep my own visceral reaction to this politics in view<sup>193</sup>. The feeling itself is an empiric to grapple with and think about.

It took me a long time to move beyond an analytical understanding of the difference between considering the “conditions of” possibility from the “limits to” possibility. Analytically the difference may seem very slight indeed: “conditions of possibility” has no purpose other than dealing with each and every specific possibility; whereas the “limits to possibility” draws a border across an array of different possibilities to create a line that marks the possible from the impossible. The subtle difference turns on contingency and the (audacity) to predict or hold off on the future. What I mean is that in the case of studying the “conditions of possibility”, if we are to take a specific object – Catalyst’s training program (the focus of this chapter) – we could look at all the practices, some more visible than others, some more “official” than others, and some “on the cusp of the organization” (for what is the spatiality of the organization?). We could study how it is some practices are visible, official, on the cusp and so on; and we could study the social relations within them. Which might lead to more questions, more conditions and more possibilities with their own set of conditions. And so on and so on. This isn’t to say examining “the limits of possibility” is not also a fertile endeavor. But it often means that even before research begins, our task is set to identify and investigate the limits to possibility before looking at all the possibilities, good and bad. Asking about “the limits” of possibility risks saying “stop” before it says “go”. This chapter explores that thin line / massive gap, using an example from Catalyst to illustrate.

In this chapter, the researchers are myself and Catalyst’s coordinators. What we are investigating (largely without realizing it) is how Catalyst is “ beholden to” (or not) the neoliberal labour market policies that have led to funding dollars for the training that Catalyst does. We also, again unwittingly, investigate the cruelties of such policy as the



coordinators confront them in their everyday work. Our research exercise – what was an actually internal evaluation of the organization – was powerfully shaped by what the cultural critic Eve Sedgwick calls a “paranoid reading”, a style of critique that searches for “the bad” and almost always proclaims fatalistic loss, destruction or uselessness. What gets sidelined in the process are other activities and questions about “who” intervenes in the labour market and what counts as “an intervention”.

This chapter winds its way to a moment of hopelessness and despair for Catalyst’s coordinators (the staff that run the training program): tracing the group’s thought process of coming to realize that the training dollars Catalyst receives stem from neoliberal labour market policy. Their despair was one infused and cultivated out of intense frustration that stem from the everyday limitations of the training program’s funding, but at a metatheoretical level, it was also a moment that saw them taking up / performing a very narrow conception of the labour market (how people can enter it to who can intervene in it). Their take is grounded in Catalyst’s efforts (and indeed, their efforts), but as I’ll show, the spatiality of their description was powerfully curtailed by a go-to mode of critique and the conceptual frames we had at our disposal.

The chapter is structured as follows: After introducing the empirical material and the context of its generation, I review particular habits of thinking and “being critical” that, as Gibson-Graham and others argue, fail to generate the imaginative capacity needed to explore otherwise possibilities. This theoretical background is important given that the issue of empirics, criticism and stance is directly related to the ethnographic material I examine in the chapter. I then turn to an evaluation of Catalyst that the coordinators undertook and what I call an instance of encountering workfare. I’ll show how the

coordinators not only came to a critique of Catalyst and the workfare policies that fund its training program, but they became hypercritical and dismissive of Catalyst itself. Their critique of neoliberal labour market policy and its role in shaping Catalyst's training program are valid, I'll argue, but its grounding on a narrowed recognition of practices and people who intervene (or have the possibility of intervening) was considerably narrowed as they took up their critical stance. In a sense, their critique is a "limits to" approach (what Gibson-Graham call "stance"). Insightful in *some ways*, my interest in this chapter is to track the change in attitude: toward the organization, toward their work, and toward possibility. I will focus in particular how their critique ignored other evidence of "intervention", and importantly, ignored the possibilities for the organization to shape the labour market (and community). Ignoring evidence here was neither callous nor intentional; instead, I will show how their stance, combined with a conception of the labour market and the "definition" of intervention by policy, worked to "dissuade" them that other practices mattered. The result was a curtailed and contained spatiality of the organization that in the final analysis was only "band-aid". Hopelessness was a reasonable response.

In the final section, I offer a reparative view of Catalyst as more-than-workfare by bringing back into the picture the activities and interventions that I witnessed there. This reparative reading will enable us to turn away from a focus on Catalyst's limits, and become interested in some of its conditions and possibilities<sup>194</sup>. Like the last chapter, this one is a multi-layered story of becoming. It is as much as a story of my own "becoming open to possibility"<sup>195</sup> as it is about the shifting spatiality of the organization "Catalyst" and the more general question of who can and does intervene in the labour market.

## **Setting: an error**

The main empirical material I use in this chapter comes from an internal organizational evaluation of Catalyst that I designed and did with Catalyst's coordinators, the staff who are responsible for running Catalyst's training program. The evaluation came on the cusp of when I was moving from being a full-time "Ph.D. researcher" at Catalyst to an employee and manager there. To be frank, the design of the evaluation was terrible and wrong-headed in many respects. How it was bad is one part of the story. What happened during and "after"<sup>196</sup> the evaluation is another – and will be my main focus. The context of the evaluation is important, for not only does it situate the coordinators, their work, it also allows us to situate the "me" in this examination as well. For both, some backstory is required.

For many months, as a researcher, I recorded everyday practices that Catalyst staff (coordinators, journeymen, apprentices and trainees) did that in a very technical sense were outside of their "approved and paid for" activities, as would be outlined in the organization's contribution agreement for funding for example. These activities seemed to be important and, in some ways, key to actually accomplishing one of the organization's mandate, which was to help people get jobs. Such practices included providing bus tickets to a trainee leaving Catalyst for a new job so they could have a transportation plan to get to their new job. Or it might be a journeyman arranging with a trainee to give them a lift to Catalyst in the morning. But it could equally include activities like crews – made up of permanent staff like the journeymen and temporary worker "clients" like the trainees – arranging coffee runs<sup>197</sup> or pooling money to gift to a

co-worker who had been robbed. Very basic stuff. Everyday stuff. I've included examples of these activities on Figure 4.

The reason for the evaluation was that Catalyst had just received a three-year funding agreement from the federal government that increased the number of trainees by twenty positions and increased the number of Level 1 Apprentices in Carpentry by 10. This meant that Catalyst was about to double in size. The funding included a new coordinator position. Therefore, the evaluation was taking place because in order to expand, the organization needed to formalize some of its policies and procedures, and the coordinator jobs needed to be reworked so that the three staff could manage the 50+% increase of program participants.

Enter my error. I got it in my head that the coordinators should know “where their funding comes from”; in other words, that it stemmed from neoliberal labour market policies. (More on the content and critique of these policies below.) Although there were specific assumptions and prescriptions of such policies that the coordinator's did not know about, I was not exactly spilling the beans on the shortcomings of the funding Catalyst receives to train people. The coordinator's had some very real data that highlighted the shortcomings of the training program and they dealt with these shortcomings on a daily basis. (Some of these are described later in the chapter.) The focus of the exercise was not specifically focused on neoliberal labour market policy, but it, along with conceptions of the labour market were to become a part of the conversation.

I was unable to find a short academic or ideas piece about the labour market or the design of training programs for underemployed and racialized communities that was not utterly boring, rife with jargon and /or incredibly policy-oriented. (In retrospect, perhaps

these were unrealistic and silly criteria, but there they are.) What I was able to find was a table that divided the labour market and factors to entry into supply and demand sides and offered detailed factors of each. The table was from an academic paper called “An employability framework” (from McQuaid and Lindsay 2005). I chose it because I had not been able to find a good conceptual drawing of the labour market nor anything really that conceptualized how a program like Catalyst’s training program (supposedly) met up with the labour market.

I introduced the table as offering us an entry point and object of comparison. We undertook the exercise by reading down the rows of the McQuaid and Lindsay table with the aim of considering how or where Catalyst responds, facilitates or “does” any of the factors listed. As we proceeded, I wrote notes across the table, creating a palimpsest that covered McQuaid and Lindsay’s abstract particulars with the coordinator’s concrete ones (See Figures 5-8).

Later in the chapter I provide a detailed interpretation of us reading the table. But before we look at the details of what happened in the evaluation, I will spill a different jar of beans: Where we ended up after doing the evaluation. Where we ended up was in a funk, and ready to announce Catalyst as a “band-aid” in terms of its ability to respond to barriers to employment faced by people who entered the training program. By looking at the details of what lead to that pronouncement, what I aim to show is that such a sweeping judgment depended on (unwittingly?) taking up the very ideas of what constitutes the labour market and interventions according to the neoliberal labour market policies that we critiqued during the exercise. The evaluation presented the coordinators with a chart and (rather unwittingly) a schema that named what “was” an intervention or

a factor in making people “employable”. Although perhaps not inevitable, the exercise-turned-critique excluded by omission all but a few of the activities found at Catalyst. In short, the materials worked to foreclose what activities and actions counted as “having anything to do with the labour market” and what counted as an intervention in it.

I tell what happened before showing it in this chapter because my interest is not just what happened but the subtle / big shifts in stance toward the organization and toward the possibility of intervening in the labour market that occurred. What happened stemmed from our collective (in)ability to engage in critique, recognize and call something “cruel” (policy) without mistaking that policy for what had actually developed on the ground, in other words, within Catalyst itself. This was more than a matter of choosing a “structural” (macro-level) critique over one focused on micro practices. What happened was an erasure of activities that did not fit within funder-approved activities and was unanticipated in the policy itself. By erasing these activities in the production of their critique, the coordinators “gave up” any agency in their own production or intervention in the labour market<sup>198</sup>. The coordinators would come to equate neoliberal labour market policy with Catalyst; and because the policy was so limiting (and cruel), so too were they. Such a moment was notable because it illustrated a narrowing down of the coordinator’s (and by extension, Catalyst’s) imaginative capacity to intervene in the labour markets beyond that deemed “fundable” from a neoliberal labour market policy prescription.

Through an examination of our reading the table together, I will show that we produced both a particular representation of Catalyst and a particular stance toward Catalyst, one that ignored many of the practices taking place at it. Consequently we ignored how / why these practices mattered and how they could be sources for

“interventions” outside of the policy / funding protocols. In order to make this claim, we need a theory of critique (or reading) to orient us.

### **Situating critique: paranoid and reparative approaches**

In an essay by cultural critic and queer theorist Eva Sedgwick, the singularity of focus with which much leftist or social justice-oriented contemporary (academic) scholarship is driven is questioned. By “singularity”, Sedgwick points to the drive to expose “hidden violence” (140) or systematize knowledge into broad categories (“reformist” or “transformational” are common examples). Describing what she calls a “paranoid critical stance”, she asks whether such a singularity is ultimately limiting.

Sedgwick’s essay turns our attention to how we practice *and* recognize critique; how we recognize and choose among knowledges in the process of gathering material for argument, critique and indeed, social action. Borrowing from Paul Ricoeur, who categorized the drive to uncover or highlight hidden violence in the works of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as “the hermeneutics of suspicion” (124-5), Sedgwick dubs this drive as today’s “paranoid reading”, a phrase she uses to highlight the methodological imperative she describes: “In a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systemic oppression, to theorize out of anything *but* a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious, or complaisant” (125-6). Sedgwick uses “paranoia” in the psychoanalytical (Kleinian) sense of a stance or position rather than in the diagnostic sense of psychosis (128-9). “Paranoia” here refers to an epistemological practice, a reading strategy that becomes focused (indeed is convinced in advance) on the bad, the impossible, or the terrible. Her use is *apropos* to the Kleinian “paranoid position” which is “marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety” and “is a position of terrible alertness” (128).

Sedgwick essay questions the purpose and appeal of this particular way of being critical. Her essay is summarized well by the cultural studies scholar Lauren Berlant, who writes that in a paranoid critical approach “dreams are seen as easy optimism, while failures seem complex” (Berlant 2011, 123)<sup>199</sup>.

Sedgwick’s argument is not that paranoid readings are (always) wrong or (simply) delusional: she notes they can and do produce imaginative and important analyzes. Instead, Sedgwick urges us to recognize that such readings “represent *a* way, among other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge” (130). The problem, as Sedgwick sees it, is that paranoid readings are taken up as “nearly synonymous with criticism itself” (124). Paranoid readings are worthy of our attention precisely because they are taken up as *the* way of being critical. This creates

“an unintentionally stultifying side effect: they may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative / epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller.” (124)

Although Sedgwick’s work is directed at academics and the printed page, I will argue her analysis is helpful for interpreting what happened during and in the conclusion (“final analysis”) of the evaluation myself and coordinators undertook of Catalyst’s training program. The body of this chapter shows the development of a paranoid stance and reading of Catalyst. The evaluation and our resulting stance is an example of a “limits to” approach to possibility.

### **Backstory: neoliberalism and workfare**

The funding for Catalyst’s training program stems from neoliberal labour market policy. Known by its critics as workfare, it is characterized by relatively low investments



(in terms of time and resources) in training, job preparedness or other workforce schemes. Neoliberal labour market strategies aim to move people who are unemployed (and particularly those on welfare) into the labour force. The policies that fund programs like Catalyst tend to focus primarily on work (“work first” is *the* top priority), meaning that such policies and their resulting programs are heavily geared towards the supply side of the labour market (Peck 2001).

Characteristically focused on supply-side investments, typical neoliberal labour market policies aim to encourage labour attachment (meaning being employed or actively looking for employment), incorporate underrepresented groups in specific occupational groups, or attempt to address barriers to inclusion and success within specific industries, largely seeking to do so at the level of the individual. Working in tandem with roll-backs to social safety nets, the package of policies concerned to shape contemporary labour markets and discipline individual (would-be) workers is known as “workfare” (see Peck 2001 for the definitive text on workfare)<sup>200</sup>. Workfare is over twenty years old, as is its embrace in the province of Manitoba (MacKinnon 2011). As the dates of my citations attest, it is somewhat “old news” in academia too. But workfare lives on, in policy and in the various experimental programming dollars such policies make available. In Manitoba, although most of the cut backs to social assistance and “welfare hating” were *du jour* in the 1990s, in the 2000s up to today, the focus has been on “active” strategies, particular those that focus on “work first”, work-force attachment and job readiness (MacKinnon 2011). Peck and Theodore (2000a) have called the encouragement of workfare (i.e. work-focused and “work first”) policies “workfare by stealth”.

Critics suggest that all workfare is problematic in the context of what is often an absence or “thin” policy and programming for activities such as job creation, or other demand-side barriers to employment – such as improvements to transit systems, childcare options or affirmative action policies. This certainly is the case if we look at the policy that funds Catalyst’s training program in more detail.

Catalyst’s first funder was the provincial government, which identified the Aboriginal population as one of its labour market challenges. The 2010 / 11 annual plan of the province’s labour market agreement with the federal government, for instance, notes the province faces “key demographic challenges”, including its “aging workforce [and] a young and rapidly growing Aboriginal population” (LMA, 2). The province’s labour market strategies focus on skills training, incorporating industry input into skills training and at least some recognition of systematic barriers to labour market entry and attachment. How well such policies address racial segmentation in the labour market is up for question: geographer’s findings on the ideological construction of “skill” (Peck 1992) and how it meets up with racialized and gendered subjects are not positive (for a short review, see Bauder 2001).

Although I cannot undertake the kind of analysis that labour market policies that documents like the LMA deserve, Table 5 offers a schematic of the province’s identified priorities, from which I will make a few notes. The funding for Catalyst’s training program falls under the “community based” employer readiness approach directed exclusively at lower-income neighbourhoods. Catalyst is a third-party service provider offering unemployed individuals that are not Employment Insurance clients with on-the-

job training, assessments and “Essential Skills” services, such as literacy, numeracy and English as an Additional Language (EAL).

The provincial—federal labour market agreement is overwhelmingly directed at the supply-side of the labour market, as is standard with neoliberal labour policies<sup>201</sup>. The same can be said for the second and major funding source that Catalyst secured: a three-year federally funded program designed to increase the skill levels and labour market attachment of Aboriginal people. The funding structure of the federal contract is akin to the provincial one, with the exception that the federal program also funds a number of positions for Level 1 Apprentice Carpenters. Like the provincial contract, no cultural or social activities are funded. Fundable activities are limited to “hard” and certifiable skills: in the main, WHMIS and First Aid certifications, and on-the-job training. All trainees and Apprentices are given work boots and a tool belt on entry. Both federal and provincial funds support Catalyst’s drivers’ training program.

Broadly speaking, neoliberal labour market policy, and workfarist programing in particular, tend to take a narrow view of interventions into the labour market. This means they tend to focus on the individual, focus on the supply-side, and imagine that how one gets and keeps a job can be reduced to personal behavior and initiative rather than societal or historical circumstances or geography. To justify such a focus, a liberal conception of the labour market itself is required: one that conceptualizes the labour market as a made up of a set of supply-and-demand characteristics, instead of a thing that is “complex, discordant, and contradictory social construct” (Peck 1996, 262) or “unabashedly ambiguous” (Hanson and Pratt 1992, 375). That is why both the federal and provincial contracts described above fund only “hard” skills, certifiable training, and

work-place must-haves (like boots and tool-belts): such are the unambiguous “skills” and “knowledge” that lead to success in the labour market.

As critics note, the ideological and practical aspects of work compulsion take attention away from – or exclude forcefully – the availability of jobs, as well as good jobs, fair wages, or fair hiring and retention practices (Peck 2001). As its name implies, workfare focuses above all on work and the individual’s role in getting and keeping a job, irrespective of wages, benefits or job security. As Peck puts it, “work values are expounded as if the problem lay in attitudes of the unemployed rather than a shortage of jobs” (Peck 1996, 212). Programs like job banks or job readiness program focus on job-seeker and worker attitudes, lack of job skills and individualized attachment to the workforce. Lastly, policy ignores how investments in training are realized over the medium-term (Peck 1996), rather in short intense bursts of “intervention”.

If work compulsion is the first principle of workfare, the notion of “employability” could be considered its central conceptual framework<sup>202</sup>. Definitions of employability are hotly debated, but an early definition by UK policy analysts is often cited:

“Employability refers to a person’s capability for gaining and maintaining employment” (Hillage and Pollard 1998)<sup>203</sup>. Employability wields the power of all “catchphrase policy” concepts, and is a concept predominant in policy circles, particularly in the UK<sup>204</sup>.

Although there have been attempts by academics to recover and expand the concept of employability to include demand-factors (which is what the paper from which the employability chart we used in the evaluation aimed to do, McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; Forrier 2003), critics of workfare policy contend that such efforts ignore the ideological

aspects of employability as a concept, and more particularly, its use in what Peck and Theodore call “the narrow confines of a supply-side employability agenda” (2000a, 741).

### **What’s cruelty got to do with it?**

Throughout the rest of this chapter I call workfare and neoliberal labour market policy “cruel”. This is an unabashed judgment of workfare policy. I do not see any other way of capturing both what workfare engenders (if often at a distance) and what its basis is: Why call it anything else? Naming it as such puts its human effect front and center and refuses to locate this judgment within the sterile, distancing language of policy. It is a frank moral judgment.

Sociological arguments that illustrate the ways that such policy is bad are readily available and reviewed, where relevant, in this chapter<sup>205</sup>. Neoliberal labour market policy is not the object of investigation. Neither is how it manifests itself at an organization like Catalyst, whose training program is funded via programs developed out of such projects. Instead, how “we” think about “interventions” while constructing the labour market is our case study from which to explore the notion of “positive thinking” in a postcapitalist sense. How “we” (workers, activists, organizations) become actors in making and intervening in the labour market via our theories or mode of critique is my interest. Let me review some of the ways that workfare is cruel.

Workfare’s two biggest cruelties are that workfare assumes that “employability” is easily achieved through a little work experience / training, and that any job is a good job. As Peck and Theodore point out, at the heart of its “employability lens” workfare insists on the idea that it is up to the lone individual to get and keep employment. The supply-side orthodoxy of workfare, from a critical labour market perspective, is cruel since

having work experience or training does not *create* jobs. Entry into the construction trades, for example, can and does not revolve around a potential employee's skills alone, but whether or not they have a drivers' license and, often, access to a vehicle<sup>206</sup>.

I will highlight particular workfare cruelties as they come into play at Catalyst, specifically the cruelties that come about as a result of what is funded through workfare policy. At the same time, I am keen to note some of the divergences I witnessed at Catalyst regarding the strict cruelties located in the funding protocols or criteria. These divergences do not solve or alleviate the cruelties of workfare, though they may make achieving the reporting goals more achievable, and in the everyday, they allow for flexibility and creative input from the coordinators or other staff. For instance, putting a trainee's training time "on hold" so they can attend an addictions program allows the trainee to have "somewhere to go" and a plan for when they come out of an addictions program. It also allows Catalyst to potentially count that trainee as a "success" when they return to Catalyst after treatment, finish the training period and employment.

In the case of policy that funds Catalyst's training program, investments in participants are relatively short (6 months), especially in the context of numerous and extensive barriers that participants face. The cruelty here is that the number and extent of "barriers to employment" can be insurmountable over the short time-period allocated. In the case of Catalyst's trainees, funders expect that the allotted funded time will take place in linear or continuous fashion (Figure 9). Few of Catalyst's trainees actually are able to complete Catalyst's training program in the allotted time, often because they are dealing with issues that keep them from being able to be at work (e.g. needing childcare, taking care of family, having no way to get to work, dealing with deaths in the family or other

personal tragedies). As a result, there are differences between what can be called “funder time” verses how trainees move through the program (compare Figure 9 and Figure 10). Funders assume when training started, hired workers would be working full-time consecutively. This is what I mean by linearity. Six-months is a relatively (if not impossible) short amount of time to increase skills and overcome other (non-skill) barriers for entry-level jobs in construction: even entry-level jobs require a baseline set of numeracy and literacy skills equivalent to a high school diploma (interview). Very few of Catalyst’s trainees enter the program with these credentials.

The short period and assumed linearity of funded training is cruel in a number of respects. For instance, on the one hand, the reason the funding exists at all is the recognition that inadequate housing, family and social issues, as well as inexperience in “real” jobs and criminal records are barriers to getting a job; yet concomitantly, funder time assumes that the transition to work will or can be smooth, and that employable skills can be readily acquired within a period of time. The short time frame aims to lower the costs to government for skill acquisition yet expects to reap the benefits of these same skills from the newly employable.

As already noted and as Figure 10 illustrates, how a given trainee moves through the program varies depending on the circumstances of the individual. Funder time can be interrupted by days off to take care of children or other family members, leaves of six-weeks (or more) to attend a drug-treatment program, or deal with health issues that pre-existed or presented themselves after entry. Funder time is also regularly contravened by the coordinators (and journeymen) when they argue that an individual trainee should be employed a little longer at Catalyst – beyond the funded six-months, either to bridge the

gap between the end of the training program and the start date of an education program or because at the time the trainee's hours are up they are dealing with family or other issues that would make them unable to succeed in a new job. Some examples of the latter might be a major death in the family, an attempted suicide of a partner, a break-up that results in the loss of a place to live, or, again, a major injury that results from being jumped<sup>207</sup>.

The circumstances that trainees faced are not unusual for the major demographic of people employed in Catalyst's training program, who were Aboriginal and Metis people. Local policy-oriented researchers note that Aboriginal people face barriers to entry and success in the labour market, citing inter-generational social and economic exclusion related to and stemming from state-sponsored colonialism (MacKinnon 2011; Silver 2002; Silver et al 2006). Aboriginal people face extensive barriers to entry and movement within the labour market. National and city-specific data broadly suggest that "Aboriginal people are both under-represented in the wage labour force, continuing to have a lower employment rate than settlers, and segregated into types of work that tend to be lower paid and less stable" (Mills and Clarke 2009, 994)<sup>208</sup>. Along with higher incarceration rates, Aboriginal people have higher rates of victimization from violent crime than non-Aboriginal people (Perreault 2011). For most of Catalyst's trainees, the number of "barriers to employment" was extensive. In some cases, particularly where a trainee "with potential"<sup>209</sup> might be facing a major set-back related to their home life, the coordinators regularly advocated and won an extension to their employment period. When this happens the trainee's wages were paid for out of Catalyst's social enterprise revenue, as there is no room within the training dollars to extend allotments<sup>210</sup>. Trainee's whose hours are extended can be on Catalyst's payroll for a few weeks to a few months.



Although some of the everyday practices that lead to major differences between funder time and non-funder time are possible at Catalyst, the fact that staff must work around the rules of funding points us to an overarching cruelty embedded in the policies that fund the training program: the funding specifically targets an Aboriginal population yet upholds neoliberal conceptions that suggest the labour market is unaffected by factors like class, race, or culture. On the one hand, programs funding Aboriginal or newcomer populations recognize these groups face barriers to labour market entry; on the other hand, program funding that limit the use of funds to skill acquisition and certifications are steadfast that personal, cultural or political contexts do not matter.

My use of the term “cruel” marks what is obvious about all forms of workfare, and with it, its narrow vision of intervening in the labour market. The next section turns to one encounter with the cruelty of workfare. Mindful to not lose sight of this cruelty, at the same time, I want to distinguish recognition of cruelty from a particular reading or stance as to what can and is possible to do within Catalyst.

### **Cruel encounters: Employability markings**

The evaluation exercise with the coordinators was an encounter with the ethos and cruelties of workfare. Here, I follow the coordinator staff as they encounter (academic) knowledge of labour markets through reading a chart that introduces an “employability framework”. I write of the process of the coordinators reading, interacting and responding to the chart and the notion of employability. I write of them coming to a critique of workfare and a critique of Catalyst’s training program.

As noted above, “employability” is a buzzword for policy makers and project officers. As a term, its policy history comes out of neoliberal labour market policy. The

employability table is part of this legacy and came from an academic paper whose aim was to revise and expand the notion of employability, or what the authors call an employability framework (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005, see Table 6). Substantively, McQuaid and Lindsay's paper argues that a focus on a revived concept of employability can adequately address conceptual shortcomings of employability's usual focus on supply-side issues. They explain:

“... if employability is fundamentally about ‘the character or quality of being employable’ then there clearly must be a role for individual characteristics, personal circumstances, labour market and other external factors in explanations of the responses of employed or unemployed people to potential employment opportunities.” (206)

Their paper advocates a broad “holistic” (208) approach to the notion of employability, one that, notably, included demand-side factors. That the authors of the table aim to expand the employability framework beyond the individual puts them in good company with Catalyst and the coordinators more specifically, for whom “employability” is a well-worn term. Around Catalyst's office, the word is used in a more-than-buzzword way. “Employability”, though it may be borrowed from the project officers who act as managers from the provincial government<sup>211</sup>, has multiple meanings and uses at Catalyst. Talk of employability keeps the focus on jobs, not criminal backgrounds when talking to local media who come in search of stories about “gang life in the neighbourhood”. Likewise, employability names a positive possible future, like being able to feed your kids or get them back from the child welfare system. It brands the trainees as already employable, in the sense that “they want jobs”. Less spoken about to visitors or to media, but discussed one-on-one, is that “employability” can be used to speak to the impressive

management, social and communication skills many trainees have from their life experience<sup>212</sup>.

Because of the above context, the “employability framework” was a boring piece of academia that was able to pique the interest of the coordinators, even as they resisted taking time to do an evaluation at all (discussed below). Improving and increasing employability is what the coordinators are doing when they do their jobs. And although some of their work lines up very neatly with the term as situated in policy (e.g. working with trainees on their resume), the very vagueness of the term allows for their job tasks to remain open to and respond to the circumstances of individual trainees.

We started the evaluation by reading the table together, using it as an entry point to think generally about “barriers to employment” and how Catalyst’s training program sought to address barriers and intervene in the labour market. Reading down the rows, we identified factors and circumstances Catalyst responded. In what follows, I first describe the chart and our interactions with it.

McQuaid and Lindsay’s table is divided into three columns labeled “Individual factors”, “Personal circumstances” and “External factors” (a basic summary of the table’s content is provided in Table 6). As McQuaid and Lindsay explain, “Employability skills and attributes” list factors that are common to what they call a “narrow concept” of employability and aspects of human capital theory (208). The second column, “Personal circumstances” “includes a range of socioeconomic contextual factors related to individuals’ social and household circumstances” (212), including cultural and / or community factors as well as factors that affect getting to work (e.g. transportation) or staying employed (e.g. adequate childcare). The last column, “External factors”,

incorporates factors usually associated with the demand-side of the labour market, such as the number and type of job opportunities available, how employers recruit and retain employees and so on. As McQuaid and Lindsay reason, “by reordering employability ... the framework restates that it is not just individual, supply-side factors that require detailed description and analysis, but all aspects of the employability equation, including demand” (213).

Even though there was some initial hesitations about the purpose of the exercise (*they knew their jobs, they knew what Catalyst was about*) and the clash or analytical mismatch between comparing an abstract presentation of supply-and-demand side factors of employability to the concrete practices of a particular training program, the exercise was able to generate discussion that allowed the group to conceptualize some aspects of Catalyst’s training program. In that way, the chart acted as a stabilizing mechanism that allowed the group to enter into a shared language. This shared language was not necessarily tied to the language contained within the chart: for instance, during our conversation, we began to discuss the skills and supports offered by Catalyst in terms of whether they were “soft” (meaning non-material) or “hard” (which was the equivalent of “real” in the sense of referring to certifications and technical know-how). What the chart offered was a way of looking at Catalyst with what could be called a labour market language.

The exercise involved reading down the rows of the chart and identifying to which factors or circumstances Catalyst’s training program responded. My notes (see Figures 5 to 8) scribbled responses and mapped on our own categories (like “hard” and “soft”) onto and across the table, creating the palimpsest I’ll call employability markings<sup>213</sup>. The

employability markings I discuss are traces of others' making sense of (particular) labour market knowledge and a way of looking at and ordering the world. They are translations of "universal characteristics" ("employability factors") into particular ones (i.e. how things "are" at Catalyst). In a few instances, the employability markings leave traces of divergent interpretive purposes of the organization, and signal tensions within the organization. I've organized my discussion first around how we went about reading the chart and making the employability markings. Later, I will turn to how the group ended up with a paranoid stance and interpretive representation of Catalyst's training program, one that followed rather than contravened funder criteria and expectations.

### *Reading the table*

The purpose of any table is to organize and systematize knowledge. In this case, by organizing a framework called "employability". How to read a table is not obvious or straightforward. Perhaps for both reasons, the analytical organization of the table bristled against the ways that the coordinators understood the organization, everyday understandings of the labour market (how many people think of the labour market in "supply and demand" terms?), as well as the connections between the items and factors listed. When we first turned to the table, for instance, one coordinator questioned the separations enacted by the columns. The very neatness of the table, she suggested, was contestable on the grounds that seeing things in boxes ignored the "travelling and murky nature" of labour market factors, confining items to a supposed "proper place" that severed interconnections. Her contention was that a person's "household circumstances" affected people's ability to perform or become educated with "employability skills and attributes" – two categories separated by columns in the table. As she pointed out, the

“demand factors” of the column titled “external factors” (read by the group as “the outside world”) impacted everything else (household circumstances, work culture, access to resources, skills and attributes and so on)<sup>214</sup>. The abstract systematization of the chart (“factors”) did not meet up with the concrete and intimate knowledge that the coordinators had of how barriers to employment work based on their experience working with Catalyst participants.

Although the chart promises a framework by which to understand the concept of employability, it also identifies – even privileges (despite the authors’ stated purposes<sup>215</sup>) – what it calls individual factors (“skills and attributes”), something critics of the concept are keen to raise as problematic about the concept of employability. Although focus on individual factors was rejected as primary by the coordinators, they pointed to the middle column (titled “personal circumstances”) and marked it as “barriers”. Indeed “barriers” is emphasized with a circle and an arrow in our markings (Figure 5). Here, the coordinators insisted that “personal circumstances”, from responsibilities like “caring for children” to the “ability to access safe, secure, affordable and appropriate housing”, were barriers that Catalyst’s staff sought to help trainees address, for example, by offering budgeting workshops, which was also added to the chart (See Figure 5). As we came to discuss, barriers to employment that included household circumstances such as housing or childcare could only be “supported” in a limited way by Catalyst; that is, by having a “supportive” staff person (one of the coordinators) who could aid trainees in the search for housing or childcare options. This kind of support was largely limited to general assistance – searches or helping fill out applications – and even then, as time permitted. Even though the role as “advocate” was cited as valuable, as we proceeded, the

coordinators would assert that these “soft supports” were hardly enough when weighed against the extent of the needs of people in the program. The further we went into the exercise, the greater the barriers seemed and the lesser the affect of Catalyst and its interventions. This is a key example of how they “encountered workfare” during the evaluation.

The coordinators asserted the language that Catalyst used in the everyday (the language of barriers) to interpret the chart, and they expanded the talk of barriers as applying to both Catalyst staff and participants in the training program. Written in the margins of the chart, the coordinators included the obvious – the barriers trainees faced – and the not-so-obvious: barriers that existed for staff aiming to address barriers. This employability marking is seen all the way down by the column “individual factors”, where the different roles of the coordinators, supervisors and tutors are brought into the picture (See Figure 7). Scribbled across the chart was that the supervisors – journeyman carpenters who teach foundational carpentry skills – are noted as providing instruction, but that instruction is “ad-hoc” (Figure 7). The ad-hoc-ness of the instruction is inserted into the chart as a barrier, speaking to the underdevelopment of the organization for its permanent staff. Here the coordinators were insisting that “barriers to employment” are not the sole burden of individuals deemed hard-to-employ or “barriered”. Instead, trainers (and other staff) may face barriers, and may specifically lack teaching skills. This is an example of how the coordinator’s read the chart “against the grain” so to speak; that is, for their own purposes and based on their own experiences. In citing training as a barrier, the coordinators were challenging one of the fundamental assumptions of Catalyst’s training program: that trainee’s barriers to employment could be overcome through

exposure to skilled trades people alone. Such an assumption could only hold if it was believed that “skills-based learning” could be wholly separated from “soft skill learning”.

Not unlike the broad competencies expected by the funders from the coordinating staff (social and emotional skills *as well as* audit and evaluation skills), what the coordinators highlighted in this example was the expectation that journeymen could *either* deliver “hard” skills-based training with soft-skills training or, that “hard skills” were (a) more important than “soft skills” or (b) the assumption that “soft skills” were taught as a matter of chance (there was no formal curriculum) along with the hard skills<sup>216</sup>. Hard skills could not be considered apart from soft skills; as such, the supervisors could be said to face a barrier, since they did not necessarily have the training to teach.

In the above ways, the employability markings inserted contextual circumstances and complexity to the employability chart. The employability markings could be said to have messed up the framework by adding particulars to general categories, and by penciling in collective (systemic) barriers alongside individualistic ones, as in the case of asserting that training staff faced barriers among the causes of exclusion from labour markets. In such a way, the coordinators were “fearless independent thinkers”. The problem, as the next section will explain, is as they generated a critique of workfare, they began to discount activities at Catalyst that directly contravened or were not under the purview of funding arrangements. What emerged was a spatial narrowing of the scope and scale of Catalyst’s current “interventions” (in the broadest terms), including a narrowing of the organization itself.

*Generating a stance*



Our encounter with the framework allowed for a group confrontation of Catalyst's role as a supply-side organization against what the chart lays out as "external" demand factors. This was the moment when the group encountered workfare. It's mark upon the chart can be seen in a marking (see Figure 7), where a note beside labour market factors reads "Catalyst promotes labour", referring, perhaps, to the fact that one of coordinator's jobs is to bring exiting trainees to potential employers and vice versa. Yet this same claim is also contested with the marking "Not about Catalyst". Here, the tensions between Catalyst's supply-side role – exiting trained trainees – sits uncomfortably beside the need and desire to provide advocacy for Aboriginal labour in the context of a racialized labour market, a topic that circulated throughout our discussion. The employability marking "Catalyst promotes labour" / "Not about Catalyst" recognized a similar tension: as a supply side organization, Catalyst does promote labour at least insofar as the training program's main fundable outcome produces bodies ready to work. But because "external factors" refer largely to demand-side factors like employer skill needs as well as preferences, the ultimate decision to hire Catalyst's exiting trainees is literally "not about Catalyst"<sup>217</sup>. In other words, Catalyst might promote trainee's skills and assist individual trainees in looking for a job, but whether or not they are hired is outside the power of Catalyst to determine. Noting this marking was an encounter with the cruelties of workfare insofar as it noted the limits of the coordinator's power. In other words, it was as if the coordinators were noting whatever their efforts, the power of hiring is not in their hands. The contradictory marking ("Catalyst promotes labour / Not about Catalyst") attests to the fact that the coordinators discussed the tension and its meaning at length.

Such a debate concerned the boundaries and relative powerfulness / powerlessness of the organization (and the coordinators) to intervene.

Touching workfare (policy) meant grappling and griping about funding, perhaps because it was through funding that the coordinator's came to "know" policy; and largely, they came to know policy via its audit procedures. Talk about the funders and auditing procedures was a recurring theme throughout the evaluation. Funders, unsurprisingly, exerted audit procedures and supervision over the coordinator's daily tasks: there were not only databases to keep current and reports to write, but demands from project officers to produce "curriculums", hiring processes and (overly-detailed) records of coordinator's daily activities. One project officer thought it was in her purview to approve whether Catalyst kept a participant on after their fundable program hours were up. She also wanted Catalyst staff to get her approval whether a participant could take a leave or be rehired. These kinds of demands and tasks were time-consuming and, in the coordinator's estimation, took time away from working with or assisting program participants. Discussion of why this and other project officers were concerned so much with such audit procedures circled back to a discussion of labour market policy. I noted, specifically, the assumptions that undergird the funding Catalyst's training program receives.

Despite earlier markings across the employability framework that named practices and barriers that would question the conceptual boundaries of the framework *and* the policies that fund Catalyst's training program, with the connection made between labour market policy and the everyday frustrations of working "within" funding limitations, at this point the coordinators came to the conclusion that the "whole reason" for Catalyst's

existence could be found in a small sub-section of the chart. This marking can be seen in Figure 6, beside the “individual factors” column, under the heading “employability skills and attributes”, and a sub-section titled “work knowledge base”, are scribbled the word “everything”. In other words, “the point of the program”.

This marking took our evaluation to the proverbial heart of workfare and led to a further excursion to the why and how of funding for the training program. The coordinators announced that Catalyst, its work and existence, stemmed from the funding programs designed in relation to the neoliberal labour market policy. This was not wrong per se; but as the coordinators came to see it, who was therefore in control of determining the success of the program were the funders, as determined by policy. As one of the coordinator’s put it, there was pressure to “get these guys somewhere”, and this “somewhere” was defined by the funders and was dutifully to be performed by the coordinators<sup>218</sup>. What was being highlighted were the ways in which quantifiable outcomes were part-and-parcel of Catalyst continuing to receive training dollars. As noted by the coordinators at the start of the evaluation, those terms were often out-of-sync with the trainees’ needs. The policy was shit. And if that was true, Catalyst was shit too<sup>219</sup>.

It was here that the mood of the evaluation took a devastating and depressing turn<sup>220</sup>. This need not have been a problem per se, for the discussion was later cited by the coordinators as helpful for unpacking the ways their jobs were emotionally exhausting. Talk of employment numbers and “the name of the game” generated a particular and negative stance toward evaluating Catalyst’s efforts to intervene in the local labour market. What was surprising about this stance were the ways in which the coordinators

came to ignore Catalyst's extra (non-funded) programming, their own contravening practices and the many other everyday practices that go over, above and beyond funder-approved practices. By the end of our meeting, the coordinators could only describe Catalyst's training program as "band-aid". "Everything" fell like a shadow upon all the other supports. The other supports became minor and undervalued. These other supports were the supports that were regularly undervalued by project officers and by the workfare policies. The difference now was the coordinators were agreeing – if in a conceding way. For example, prior to their encounter with workfare, activities noted as very much part of the program included (some of) the "soft" social supports, like cultural programming. The markings of these supports speak to the everyday knowledge the coordinators confront as part of their jobs in working with (some of) the trainees – facts, like that living on their own can be scary, both because of the financial task of paying rent and the emotional one of being alone. As we see marked in Figure 5, "life conversations" and contacts with elders enter the picture, and indeed, are part of the "access to resources" that Catalyst's social supports fall into. But when workfare (policy prescription) was encountered, these markings were rendered meaningless.

If so much of the exercise dealt with and confronted the cruelties of workfare, it was not as if the possibility of a more adequate program was altogether lost. We can see something of this at the bottom of Figure 5, a marking that speaks to what might make the program more adequate in the coordinator's view: a program longer than six months, and dedicated staff time to develop ongoing contact with trainees that had exited the program. The shadow of the workfare "point of the program" put a damper on imagining what or who might lead to a more adequate training program.

There is a difference to draw out here: between an encounter with workfare and its cruelties as they played out in the day-to-day of Catalyst and the work of the coordinators with a paranoid reading of the organization, where Catalyst is “band-aid” in lieu of the racialized labour market and cruel policy. The difference – slight / big – can be discerned by thinking about it in terms of empirics. To maintain their paranoid reading required that they ignore many of their own practices, including programming that Catalyst offered that was not funded by government grants. It also required a narrowing of who can and does intervene in the labour market in and around Catalyst, or more specifically, whose “job” it was to intervene. Precisely: the paid staff. Catalyst became limited to the policies that “birthed” it; in other words, neoliberal (workfare) policy.

Confronting the fact of Catalyst’s training program as a version of workfare is one thing, but the coordinators were doing more than this. They were confirming it too. Importantly, as they came to the conclusion that Catalyst was “band-aid”, they began to count and discount activities as “mattering” (and even as existing). In other words, the coordinators became entrapped by the very critique they were producing. The coordinators’ encounter with workfare produced a (self-)presentation of Catalyst that, while not untrue, focused narrowly on the funder approved and paid for programs for labour market interventions. This presentation involved ignoring the coordinator’s everyday practices (and those of others) in favour of the “should-bes” of Catalyst’s program delivery. For instance, as the exercise came to a close, the coordinators could not distinguish between those programs the funders paid for and those that Catalyst’s social enterprise revenue paid for when they evaluated the ways Catalyst attempted to intervene

in the labour market, in the main interventions were limited to through individualized work with trainees.

To elaborate, it is not simply that the coordinator's were unaware or "forgot" about the activities and programming that they incorporated into Catalyst's training program. Instead, and more seriously, they came to see "labour market intervention" as a narrow set of activities with the same boundaries as the neoliberal policies that limit *fundable* interventions to hard and certifiable skills and limited social supports. This means, *inter alia*, that they came to talk about Catalyst's cultural programming and other activities as not mattering much. Paired with a critique of the short-comings of individually-centered programing, the "labour market" became too big, too all-powerful to intervene in at all. Hence, the program was band-aid and ineffective in relation to a large wound (i.e. the labour market).

### **A reparative reading**

The coordinators' critique of Catalyst created a representation of Catalyst that ignored the everyday practices that the coordinators and others at Catalyst regularly engaged: as they came to a statement that Catalyst was band-aid, they also came to say that only some activities – the funded ones – mattered as "real". I've mentioned many of these already: activities like employing trainees for longer periods than funding allotted; overriding the funder's preferred linearity of the training employment period; organizing classes and programs that from a funder / policy standpoint have "little or nothing to do" with addressing barriers to employment (e.g. cultural events, political events) and so on. My concern is not simply that the existence of some activities disappeared from view; with it, I argue, the scope and (human) resources that Catalyst has at its disposal to

intervene in the local labour market narrowed considerably. That is, as the coordinators came to agree that Catalyst was “band-aid”, the spatiality of Catalyst shrunk considerably. This involved only recognizing some people (and not others) as intervening in the labour market. To explore this further, I undertake a reparative reading of Catalyst<sup>221</sup>.

My interest in offering a reparative reading is to bring back into view the activities that disappeared by the conclusion of the evaluation exercise described above, as well as to introduce some other activities that I have not yet noted. The latter include practices that extend beyond individualized programing to include trainee’s families, other non-profits / charities (including other social enterprises), government funders, and indeed, employers.

Figure 4 offers one possible reparative mapping. The funded and / or “official” Catalyst training activities<sup>222</sup> are in the center of the map. Most of these activities are acknowledged by funders as “acceptable” labour market interventions. As we move to the outer circle, the activities expand to include those undertaken by staff, by co-workers (including those in the training program), as well as activities funded by Catalyst’s social enterprise, and activities that take part in the local CED community that Catalyst is a part. I discuss some of these in more detail below.

As Chapter 3 described, Catalyst operates as a social enterprise and a training program, which in practice, expands the programming options available to funded employees insofar as the organization is not necessarily limited by what government programs deem as valuable or proven in terms of producing employable and employed participants. Many of these extras are cultural programs and staff events that focus on

family or Aboriginal cultural healing and well-being. The social enterprise provides some wiggle-room to extend trainee employment beyond the funder-determined training period of six-months. The practices that are paid out of Catalyst's social enterprise revenue, which directly enhance the training program activities, are largely "off the books", meaning, they are not articulated or claimed by Catalyst as supporting or enhancing the training program. Yet these practices, if quite minor in many ways, (attempt to) supplement the shortcomings of the funding dollars insofar as they address barriers to employment and labour attachment beyond a the dictates of neoliberal market policy. In so doing, Catalyst figures work-life issues broadly, for instance, by conceptually going beyond the role of individual to include practices that involve community healing, political activism and advocacy. Even describing the need for community healing in relation to the task of increasing Aboriginal peoples' involvement in the labour market might be considered a radical gesture<sup>223</sup>.

Unlike the employability framework, this mapping of activities and practices asserts no organizing schema. And unlike the employability markings, there is no "everything" that can be named as "the point of the program". The funded programs are listed and are important, but do not predominate. Some "extra-curricular activities" are not unusual activities at other workplaces / small businesses – activities like company baseball teams or family events are common strategies that employers of all sizes use to create or cultivate a positive workplace culture and foster employee loyalty. Nor are practices like taking turns going on coffee runs or sharing rides to work all that unusual. Practices like "resume printing" sit just outside the acceptable circle because staff regularly provide printing for former trainees and their family members. "Mentoring"



includes but goes beyond mentoring for trades-based education and work, as some trainees have aspirations of higher education, are or want to be practicing artists or have interest in trades other than carpentry and plumbing. “Listening” can involve one-on-one chats or what might be called community counseling (e.g. meeting other survivors of the foster care system or delving into the generational legacies of the residential school system).

Many of the activities represented on this map are not squarely focused on employment and waged work. Represented on the map are a range of labours: from caring labours (baking treats for co-workers, collecting money and goods for a co-worker that had been robbed); self-employment (selling artisan products or doing handyman work on weekends); and volunteer labour (sandbagging, political action and advocacy). If the map was developed further, it could also include the contact with sister organizations where trainees receive support services. It could also include anti-poverty advocacy and activism, for example<sup>224</sup>.

Who is behind these activities is not limited to paid staff. Instead, participants – trainees and Apprentices; board members; Elders (who provide teachings at sweats or other events) also appear as doing vital work. They are granted a role in intervening in the sense that they make it possible for Catalyst’s training staff to show up, to “find support” and to make connection. In this reading, the very spatiality of the organization is extended beyond paid staff. Much like we saw in Chapter 3, it is more porous.

Such activities are (somewhat) separated (under the radar, off the books, unacknowledged) from the “dictates” of workfare yet I suggest a part of an enriched and wealthier community economy that prioritizes access and entry to viable and well-paid

jobs. If this mapping indicates some of the circuits and capillaries of a larger community economy, how might some of the current practices be further cultivated to “take back the labour market”? How might these activities and the knowledge gleaned from participating within them be harnessed to develop labour market policies and programs? How might these activities and knowledges be used to create change within labour markets with (or without) government-scripts as to what constitutes “training” or “employability”? And, equally, how might these activities and knowledges be used to muddle, modify or play with the supply-side line?

Is it possible to encounter workfare without losing sight of the possibilities that exist within – wrapped up *and* conditioned by – its cruelties? What if Catalyst’s unfunded programs, along with the everyday activities of staff and relations among co-workers (including trainees here) are thought of as “real” interventions in the local labour market? What possible attachments to legitimate (wage-labour) work or, perhaps, engagements in community economies are already or could be actively sought by Catalyst? What happens when we consider the difference between “funder approved” practices and protocols with the actual practices of employment at Catalyst? Lastly what are some of the holdbacks to thinking about “taking back the labour market”?<sup>225</sup>

Asked to offer suggestive answers to such questions, I have two examples.

The first: Anecdotally, the experience of community action (like sandbagging), going to rallies (to call for an end to violence against Aboriginal women) and community events (like an annual blueberry breakfast in support of an inner-city charity that provides grants to small business start-ups) creates another relation to the community (neighbourhood, city, province) than trainees experienced as wards or prisoners of the

state and as outsiders and outcasts of society. Trainees often expressed a belonging to the world that was unlike anything they had experienced previous. The world became their world and this was often noted as a new experience. The isolation of being (identified as) a criminal, a gang member and /or a negative self-appraisal as an “Indian” was broken. New relations to and with the world became possible<sup>226</sup>. Figured as a larger effort of “taking back the labour market” such activities are interventions in the sense that the labour market is reimaged as no longer a separate or impenetrable sphere but part of a greater (unknown) world that trainees can gain experience and confidence.

A second, the self-organized activities of trainees (arranging rides, sharing work experiences and a support network). While working at Catalyst, trainees regularly self organized rides, coffee runs and generating support (for example, in the form of cash or goods when another worker was jumped). And former trainees often dropped by in off hours or when they were out of work. What if Catalyst was thought of not so much as an organization that trains people for work but as also a meeting place for those looking for support from their peers? Here Catalyst “intervenes” in the labour market by providing a nodal point for those seeking employment or looking for car-pools to work and so on. As a meeting place, trainees are no longer in the position as (a)lone individuals looking for work, but a part of a community of people with stories of struggle and success<sup>227</sup>.

A reparative reading contests the narrowed-down version of Catalyst’s activities that the coordinators produced when they became entrapped by a vision of “Catalyst” via the policy that funds its training program. Representing a wider range of economic, social and political activities happening within Catalyst might be brought into view as the stuff with which to actively and potentially shape the local labour market, and it must be said,

to enlarge the scope of work beyond paid labour alone. Indeed, this reparative reading of Catalyst can be a tool to assess and assert its larger role as part of a community economy, bringing into view practices that its members, advocates, workers and training program participants (and others) might value and expand.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we watched as the coordinators went through an evaluation exercise that aimed to put the everyday activities at Catalyst in conversation with the labour market policies that fund Catalyst's training program. As an account of Catalyst's coordinators encountering workfare and the labour market, my account pivots on the "unstable objects" of some empirics over others. How do "empirics" (or what is recognized as and achieve the status of relevant empirics) "touch" what's possible? How does what's "seen" carry over into a project to explore possibilities versus mark the limits of possibilities?

I was specifically interested in the stance that the coordinator's developed as we undertook the evaluation, arguing that their reading became a "paranoid one". This is just a way of saying they became obsessed with finding the limits to Catalyst. Although there are many limits to Catalyst, my point was to show that these limits should not preclude interest in other activities being cultivated at Catalyst. Most significantly, I questioned the boundaries of "labour market intervention" being constituted by workfare policy (in their reading).

My interest in this chapter was not to suggest the coordinators were dumb or duped; in fact, quite the opposite. Their resulting mood spoke to the fact that all of the coordinators cared about what they were doing and that their jobs were marked by the

cruelties imposed by workfare. Although the coordinators confronted and contested these policies (and with it a narrow conception of the labour market), they nonetheless became privy to such a conception of the labour market and its operation. Their stance, by the evaluation's end, was a dis-empowered one. The coordinators insisted that, for example, cultural, social and political activities mattered, yet they became almost "enamoured" with the limits placed on the organization by funding protocols and workfare policy. Moreover, following their encounter with workfare, they maintained an equivalence between policy and its roll-out at Catalyst. As I noted throughout, this "final" description of Catalyst left out many activities that even the coordinators engaged in and which contravened funding. The paranoid stance left no room to imagine or theorize what their everyday and contravening practices could mean or in what ways such activities could be expanded, systematized or used to develop what might be called a community economy's approach to wage-labour market intervention. In a way, the interventions that Catalyst did do (as per the funding agreement) was akin to their jobs; this, I argued, wholly reduced not just the activities of the organization, but reduced them to a limited number of people within them (in the main: themselves). Left out of such a vision were the journeymen (who taught literally taught the "hard" skills but equally mentored trainees about the ins-and-outs of the construction industry), elders (who offered ceremonies and connected trainees to community and healing places), people from other organizations (who might teach or alert trainees to opportunities) and the trainees themselves (who might form bonds with each other to be on the lookout for jobs, daycare, or schooling options). All such actors were active in seeking to intervene in the labour market; this, I suggest, is an important point, if only because the interest in making / finding / keeping jobs was not

fully an individualist pursuit. Yet there is little imaginative capacity to understand many of the practices I mapped as anything other than individualist and / or survivalist – such a lack is not the lone purview of Catalyst’s coordinators when they encountered workfare.

I sought to reopen the possibility of Catalyst’s training program through a reparative reading. My interest in undertaking a reparative reading was not to dismiss what the coordinator’s had to say about labour markets, the work they do, the critiques they have of the organization or the policies that fund them. Instead, I am interested in dislodging the coordinator’s “concluding” critique of Catalyst, which was fixed on the negative instead of just being aware of it. Seeking to restore the vision of what also is and what could be, the reparative reading of Catalyst and its training program sought to identify and map Catalyst’s (more) diverse labour and community economy practices. What my reparative reading of Catalyst aimed to bring into view are possible openings in which we can consider how community economies can and do intervene in the labour market<sup>228</sup>. What activities or practices “count” in how we conceptualize the labour market and attempts to regulate or intervene in it? These are questions that can be taken up by others.

Importantly, the resulting map includes both individual acts (e.g. rides to and from work or appointments) and collective, political ones (e.g. participation in community events, political rallies and the like). My reparative reading of Catalyst aimed to map some of Catalyst’s activities that can form part of its internal planning as well as the further development of its external advocacy for programs that are directly impactful on labour market policy or practices. As such, the reading offers an interpretation of the present with the intent to turn the mapped activities into fodder with which to make

political claims, plan and organize activities, and work towards intervening in the labour market.

To return to the topic of “positive thinking” that opened this chapter, the tricky thing is, Gibson-Graham do and do not just mean “uplift” when they write about hope and “positive thinking”<sup>229</sup>. Because “feelings” are not (as) separable (as we might like) from analytical work. This chapter offered one attempt to show how mapping / making “a postcapitalist politics” is as much about what is “seen” and “felt” as it is about how findings are situated<sup>230</sup>. Opening the emotional-intellectual-ethical floodgates, the chapter dealt with cruel matters (contemporary labour market policy, workfare, local labour markets), delved into a metatheoretical “cruelty” (the downside of hypercriticality: depression!), and fashioned one postcapitalist response (a re-reading). In so doing, my aim was not only to seek to illustrate the gap, but also engage with circumstances that are complicated and cruel without succumbing to hopelessness in the process.

It is material such as the above that Gibson-Graham’s prodding for “positive thinking” alights. Such is not a claim to ignore or substitute the reparative reading with the insights from the coordinator’s confrontation of workfare and their employability markings. Their insights – their acknowledgement of the cruelties of workfare programming, their protests attesting to the “band-aid” of a training program directed at Aboriginal labour that does not give enough credence to the veracity of barriers to entry and survival within the formal labour market – are also fodder with which to make political claims.

Encountering workfare, I argue, involves navigating its (policy and regulatory) cruelties, all the while engaging in speculative imagining and action within the very

organizations it birthed. As much as this chapter is about encountering workfare, so to is it about encountering possibility.



## **Chapter 6: Concluding remarks**

This ethnography was based on fieldwork in two organizations / community economies: a CED-focused initiative, the social enterprise and training program Catalyst, and an “alternative” economic project to buy their building and run it as a cooperative, the Emma Goldman Permanent Autonomous Zone (E-PAZ). I used the ethnographic material from over two years of fieldwork to explore Gibson-Graham’s postcapitalist politics, including some of the tactics, strategies and analyses their work suggests. At both sites, I was particularly interested in how otherwise ideas and practices were created, developed, or as the case may be, made unattainable. As I illustrated throughout the thesis, both organizations, in differing ways, had to contend with ideas about economy, capitalism, and alternatives-to-capitalism; likewise, both were shaped by these ideas in subtle and profound ways.

The thesis showed that although capitalocentric ideas and knowledge were (seemingly) at times very powerful and pervasive, otherwise ideas and thinking were always “in the air”. And both were consequential. How capitalocentric ideas, thinking or performances were or came to “dominate” was an interest throughout the thesis, especially in the first half. Keeping capitalocentric thinking in tension with “postcapitalist” thinking gave me the opportunity to explore the various ways the former had or maintained purchase. It also allowed for an examination of some of the challenges that postcapitalist ideas, knowledge and ways of being have vis-à-vis capitalocentric ones.

In the last half of the thesis, I used Gibson-Graham’s ideas in a different way. Exploring the processes of being and becoming, I used the situational material from each

site to open up questions of concern that I argued were relevant for the two organizations, and may be relevant for similar organizations. For example, examining the specific difficulties of becoming cooperative at the E-PAZ led me to ask big questions that could be addressed to the (local) cooperative movement: how might we learn to become cooperative? For those working within projects that draw on less-than-ideal (and in some cases, cruel) funding for job readiness or creation, how might a diverse economies approach be utilized to “take back the labour market”?

The thematic interest throughout was on possibility, and more specifically, on what is possible to think and forge in each of the two community economies in the present. From Gibson-Graham, the thesis viewed economic possibility as a mode of politics. This meant that my research understood economy not as a given but as a performed object. Throughout the thesis we encountered examples of how economies, including economic ideas and objects, can be performed in mainstream and otherwise ways. We saw that how people thought economy highly affected what they believed was possible to do and which course of action made (often “obvious”) sense.

Reading Gibson-Graham’s work as an invitation toward theorizing the ways in which a postcapitalist politics might be enacted, each chapter explored a theme or idea from their work. Chapters sought, in a variety of ways, to explore or expand specific insights from their work in detail and within the context of two already existing community economies. The four main chapters alternated between Catalyst and the E-PAZ Co-op. I began by examining the fate of otherwise ideas using the example drawn from the E-PAZ’s discussions on how rent could be distributed among tenants. Then I examined hegemonic and otherwise notions of how social enterprise was conceived and

performed at Catalyst. Both chapters focused on the role or use of capitalocentric knowledge. Capitalocentrism was in no way singular. For example, I examined how it came about that the E-PAZ, a group full of ideas and knowledgeable about already existing alternatives, could come to a moment where the idea of not using (what were referred to as) “market rate numbers” seemed unimaginable. The ease with which the group tossed their many otherwise ideas aside was astounding. The case gave us the chance to examine a moment where a wide range of possibilities was put on hold because it was proclaimed there was only “one way” of doing things (basing rent on market rates). What my analysis aimed to tease out were the ways that capitalocentric knowledge was assumed / assured via gendered discourses and gender power – in this case, used as a silencing technique. The second chapter showed very different ways of thinking social enterprise and argued that thinking social enterprise in a capitalocentric way was merely fitting social enterprise into existing (capitalocentric) schemas of what firms are and how they operate. In both instances, my use of the term “capitalocentric” was a shorthand for practices which saw the economy as inevitably and essentially capitalist or, as in the case of a capitalocentric rendering of “business” in Chapter 3, as essentially and only driven by profit and ruled by rationalism, as per hegemonic stories of business. In this sense, “capitalocentric knowledge” was understood in the thesis not so much a thing as an event.

The last two chapters took up Gibson-Graham’s interest in identities and subjectivity, specifically focused on being and becoming. Chapter 4 examined the apology, a kind of tic that developed among the E-PAZ group, which I suggested was a symptom of the group not wanting to know that they had to learn to become cooperative.

Chapter 5 also examined being, in this case, the status of Catalyst's day-to-day activities as interventions in the local labour market. Academic knowledge – to use the example of the labour market – what constitutes it, what kind of interventions were funded and figured as “legitimate” played pivotal roles in how the coordinator's understood “Catalyst” and their roles within it. Although sympathetic to their critique, the chapter suggested that their final reading was unduly influenced by a critical “paranoid” stance, one which is overly-sure of the roll-out of policy. In this instance, what Gibson-Graham's postcapitalist politics offered was a toolbox for re-membering and reconstituting both what Catalyst was and what resources and activities were currently available to intervene in the labour market.

Each chapter dealt with disparate events, and each was united by an interest in exploring Gibson-Graham's postcapitalist politics. Chapters were experimental in the sense that they approached the empirical material as an opportunity to engage in thought experiments about one or more aspects of postcapitalist politics. This is key to situating the thesis, its successes and limitations. I aimed to treat Gibson-Graham's work as a toolbox of concepts, creative strategies and analytic suggestions which I could use as needed within the context and projects I was involved. My thesis did not aim to test their theories but to see how I could use their ideas to understand and intervene in my own worlds.

Chapter 2, *Thinking Otherwise Rent*, sought to add to the development of discourse of community economies, a call Gibson-Graham make in their 2006 text *A Postcapitalist Politics*. The chapter described the practical challenge of their call in the context of the E-PAZ's discussions on rent. This involved capturing the complexities of competing and

“mixed up” discourses of capitalocentric, alternative economic and “otherwise ideas” of property and rent and its relation to the various kinds of trouble the E-PAZ’s discussions of rent raised for the group. The chapter offered evidence of the limitations and drawbacks of capitalocentric starting points, and likewise, explored their appeal. Not having a way to think about property ownership outside a capitalocentric frame was one such hold back, leading some members to feel the choices for creating economy were not just limited but foreclosed. The discussions about rent was interesting because of the persistence that there was more wiggle room, and certainly more ideas for how economy might be alternative and otherwise “within” the Cooperative. Importantly, the chapter illustrated that despite an analysis of property and rent that was strongly capitalocentric, there was a strong desire for alternative and otherwise rent. In this way, Gibson-Graham’s ideas were productively used to identify and name otherwise thinking and action.

The chapter well illustrated some of the hold backs that capitalocentric thinking can have on economic possibility. For example, some members’ understanding of property as essentially and only ever capitalist meant that excitement about the project was tempered by feelings of betraying their politics. The chapter also showed the multiple ways “otherwise possibilities” could be directly threatened. In this sense, we saw potentially exciting ideas struggle amongst fear, uncertainty, as well as threats, talk of “reality”, and even name-calling. Although Gibson-Graham readily acknowledge “difficulties”, an account like the one detailed in Chapter 2 can, I hope, offer some exposure, training, and the opportunity to discuss and strategize other possible options.

Despite the difficulties my chapter described, the chapter was nonetheless hopeful: as I argued, otherwise ideas were not impossible to think, they were just difficult to think.

The difference is crucial. The contribution the chapter makes to the discussion opened by Gibson-Graham is in the details: “feelings” of economic uncertainty has a role to play in the shutting down of imagining possible worlds; what the chapter showed were some of the very concrete and material make-up of such feelings. The larger point was that narratives of complexity can offer a lot of ground from which groups can use to develop their (local) discourse of community economy.

Chapter 3, *Performing Social Enterprise*, was also about thinking. There, I argued that how social enterprise is “thought” has consequences. The chapter offered two contrasting performances of social enterprise. The first, which I described as capitalocentric, examined the work of two researchers as they sought to fit Catalyst into a conception of social enterprise that could be summarized as “one part social, one part business”. Although they used such a conception so their analysis of Catalyst could fit with an already established model of evaluation, the work of doing so illustrated a number of conceptual problems they faced along the way. For example, deciding what was a social versus a business expense exposed the conflation the researchers were making and affecting their analysis: the conflation insisted that the supposed “social part” of Catalyst come from government training dollars. Or, in another example, that the wages for Catalyst’s journeymen should be counted exclusively as a “business expense” even though the journeymen’s job was to train participants<sup>231</sup>. The capitalocentric and postcapitalist performances might lead us to ask: What are the barriers, burdens or economic geographical conditions that produce stoppages in thinking social enterprise as experimental, multiple, and potential sites for building community economies? The contrast, so prevalent in talk about social enterprise encountered in the field (what I called

SE talk), enrolls social enterprise into already-existing schemas of thinking economy, where “the enterprise” and “the social” are understood as mutually exclusive and opposed categories / entities.

How might postcapitalist thinking be employed to further other ways of thinking social enterprise? My tactic in Chapter 3 was to follow some of the ways that postcapitalist thinking, in particular enterprise politics, could be employed. Tours of Catalyst, given by their executive director offered one such example. I argued enterprise politics can be a resource for keeping an expansive and messy conception of social enterprise alive and flourishing. Enterprise politics seek to re-socialize the enterprise and expand the sites of intervention within and between them. The postcapitalist performance of Catalyst by their executive director illustrated how firms can coordinate and convene other firms and organizations to change regulation and address social and environmental problems.

Chapter 4, *Becoming Cooperative*, engaged an interest in becoming as set out by Gibson-Graham and other postcapitalist scholars. The chapter staged multiple returns to a compulsive apology as a case study of becoming in the context of the E-PAZ cooperative. The apology, I suggested, was a kind of tic individuals involved in the process of making the Cooperative developed as a way of covering up the difficult knowledge they would rather (and reasonably) want to disavow: that they had to learn to become cooperative, and that membership in the cooperative was not the natural outcome of prior tenancy in the building. Returning to the apology, specifically a recorded sample that mocked it, opened the discursive space for me to account for the group’s constitutive fantasies. The chapter advocated for more concern with cooperative subjecthood than on cooperative

membership. I argued focus on the cooperative form is a serious mistake, and showed what this mistake looked like at the E-PAZ. Specifically, I examined our use of formal consensus and our inability – on a number of fronts – to engage with each other on difficult topics (including which topics should be deemed “theoretical” versus “practical”!).

Although this was a particular example of grappling with what it means to be cooperative, some of the resulting analysis may be relevant to others in the cooperative world. My starting point was that the common ways in which cooperative developers advocate for cooperative creation – with focus on incorporation, by-laws and other procedures – risks missing what is key about cooperatives: the social relations between members. Likewise, I questioned the rationalist and mechanical employment of formal consensus, a problem that anarchist literature suggests is not unique to the E-PAZ. Both issues point to a need to develop further ideas and tools for these kind of institutional forms and practices.

Chapter 5, *Encountering Workfare*, illustrated the gap between encountering social-economic cruelty (in the form of workfare) while looking for and creating possibility – in this case, meaningful interventions in a racialized labour market. I suggested “possibility” in the face of such cruelty can be understood as a thin line / wide gap; and part of the challenge of Gibson-Graham’s “positive thinking” was to see how even the most limited set of possibilities could contain a much wider array of possibilities. It is easy to sympathize with the coordinators when they “chose” one take on Catalyst over another; the argument being that a paranoid stance is common to a critical one. What I sought to highlight in the chapter were the ways thinking about the labour market and what counts



as an intervention was generated via the type of critical stance the coordinators took (i.e. a paranoid one). This, combined with a narrowed-down conception of the labour market and what constitutes an intervention (as defined by the labour market policies funding Catalyst's training program), made seeing the already existing activities at Catalyst impossible. I argued that the coordinator's critique of Catalyst was sustained by a very limited conception of what constitutes an "intervention" (action) within the labour market – and it was defined by the neoliberal labour market policy that funded Catalyst's training program. I sought to show that there were many other activities going on at Catalyst, and these too could be construed as interventions. Undertaking a reparative reading of Catalyst's labour market interventions highlighted these. How the coordinator's hyper-critically came about was an important part of the story, guided as it was by paranoid thinking, and by academic knowledge and policy prescription of what constitutes an "intervention" and the boundaries of the labour market. Seeing the wider array of activities from a postcapitalist perspective could offer already existing examples of intervention in local labour markets not usually recorded as such – by Catalyst staff, by the policies that fund its training program nor by the literature that is rightly critical of workfare. Importantly the chapter asked a community economy question: Who do we recognize as "intervening" in the labour market? What counts as an "intervention" once a neoliberal model of the labour market is foresworn? And how can we "take back the labour market"? The being / becoming in question in this chapter then concerned the status of who was "a subject" and "active" in making the labour market. The chapter argued intentional politics of intervening in the local labour market was already possible, and in many ways, already underfoot.

## Engaging the work of Gibson-Graham

As described at length in the introduction, this thesis was written in conversation with the ideas and suggestions of J.-K. Gibson-Graham's multivocal work. Gibson-Graham's 1996 text, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* challenged mainstream representations of the economy. Their argument was that capitalocentric views – academic and popular – worked to obscure a much more diverse, more-than-capitalist economy, and resulted in the foreclosure of imagination about building community economies. Gibson-Graham's work provoked researchers and activists to see and represent economies as a diverse range of non-capitalist as well as capitalist activities; to invent new languages or revamp old ones – all for the purpose of expanding our imagination as to what could be thought and done in the here and now. The force and implication of Gibson-Graham's analysis was broad. Their 2006 follow-up, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, pushed these ideas to include the “becoming” of subjects, the effect of affect and feelings on economic possibility, while further developing strategies and tactics for recording, rereading and making community economies.

What I have not included in the thesis is a direct engagement with the substantive critiques Gibson-Graham's work has garnered. I have done so for the simple reason that to try to do so seemed to put trunk in other scholar's critiques at the outset, which I thought would be a distraction to my efforts to engage with their work. This seemed especially defensible given that I had my own struggles with their work, which as noted in Chapter 5, center around that critical difference between starting with a “limit to” possibility approach rather than a more open and exploratory task of finding and forging possibility. I thought it important to take that challenge very seriously. Another reason to

avoid some of the critiques of Gibson-Graham was many seem to me plain bad readings of their work. The idea, for example, that Gibson-Graham think all non-capitalisms are “good” or that their interest in “diverse economies” is simply synonymous with “alternative economic spaces”, or that they fetishize the local and artisanal are common mis-readings (all of them can be found in Samers 2005, others can be found in Curry 2005). One major mis-reading that is also a useful critique is the idea that Gibson-Graham present all “non-market” or non-capitalist, “community economy” activities as intrinsically good (Curry 2005; Aguilar 2005; Lawson 2005; Samers 2005).

Some misreadings are more the result of a misconstrued sense of Gibson-Graham’s political project. Is there a difference between “seeing capitalism everywhere” and not seeing capitalism as a reasonable and important object of study? I think there is, but many critiques of Gibson-Graham seem read their critique of capitalocentrism as a critique of studying capitalism(s). Does an interest in the diverse economy necessarily mean that different kinds of capitalism can no longer be assessed or critiqued? Do Gibson-Graham create a world in which critiquing actually existing capitalism is no longer possible? I think the answer to such questions is no, but it is true that most of the work to date by post-capitalists have been concerned to simply identify processes of non-capitalism where previous work had only seen capitalism. This is true of Gibson-Graham and O’Neill’s politics of the enterprise work (2001) as it is “valuing what has been relegated to the periphery” (i.e. noncapitalist processes in “capitalist countries”) (St. Martin 2005, 959). What Gibson-Graham asked is how can we theorize “capitalism without representing [its] dominance as a natural and inevitable feature of its being?”(1996, 5). That was not a call for not studying capitalism nor a proclamation that capitalism was not

impactful, exploitative or taking up too much economic space. Part of their theoretical protest was the suggestion that capitalocentrism limits the anti-capitalist imagination from the get-go: if “capitalism is the only game in town”, the driver and the effect, why bother after all? Their response to critics is to say their scholarly interventions are “relying upon and contributing to a new political imaginary for economic politics” (2005, 119). Their focus on political imaginaries is central to understanding their work: their efforts and the three elements that make up a postcapitalist politics aim “to resignify economy as an ethical and political project of becoming” (121). I read Gibson-Graham’s work as “account[ing] for the demotion and devaluation of non-capitalism” (1996, 7) and seeking to reinvigorate an anti-capitalist imagination.

Of course, not all critiques are bad readings or misconstrued, and it is these critiques that I want to review briefly. There are a number of critiques leveled at a project of postcapitalism, some which are instructive for the further elaboration of ideas and practices. Underexplored are how “diverse” and especially “community” economies are connected or wired into global capitalism (Lawson 2005). As are the plays and processes of “uneven development and domination” (Lawson 2005, p. 37). Writing specifically about their community projects in the Philippines and their work on “postdevelopment”, Phillip Kelly (2005) says that Gibson-Graham’s type of community development have “a number of issues” that “ultimately revolve around questions of scale and power” (40). One is that their “approach must...reconcile the cultural power to *define* with the political-economic power to *deprive*” (40). Like other critics (Glassman 2003), Kelly is particularly suspicious of the absence of the nation-state in Gibson-Graham’s analysis of their action-oriented work (40): “Beyond the circuit of the community economy lies the

power of a broader political economy and its entanglements with the apparatus of state” (42). By ignoring the state and political power (whether at the scale of individuals, communities or regions), Gibson-Graham can show localized examples of community economies flourishing without much thought about sites where community economies do not and can not flourish. Nor does it address where political work for changing policies and politics is more acutely needed.

Similar critiques could be had of much of this thesis: for example, in neither E-PAZ chapter did I address the issue of, for example, the ways that changes in financial markets could come to bear on interest rates, which could make the building wholly unaffordable. Nor did I concentrate on how the changes to the downtown district they were located could create a culture of “unwelcome” from in-moving commercial neighbours or how, if building values in the area rose, so could the value of their building, potentially increasing property tax to an unaffordable rate for the members. I focused on the internal question of rent because it happened to be what was *almost* in the grasp of the group to see it as something they could affect or shape. The discussion of rent was then a “nugget” of possibility that the completely capitalocentric view – perhaps even my own – of the so-called “outside world” could not overcome. In so doing, there was no room to consider the interaction (for lack of a better word) between the internal space of decision that the group sought to build and how they interacted with actors within (so-called) capitalist spaces. Likewise, there was an opportunity to turn to look at both the role of government and policy in the chapters concerning Catalyst, because I had access to many behind-the-scenes meetings with program officers and the like, or because even the two researchers we met in Chapter 3 could be viewed as state actors, or even

because of all the grants I would eventually apply on behalf of the E-PAZ and Catalyst. Indeed, I did attempt to write a chapter considering some of this, but it was abandoned because of feeling I was going over the same ground as others (such as Hayman 1995 or Mountz 2003). Interactions or meet ups then between postcapitalist possibility within community economies and “the mainstream” is underexplored – both in the existing literature as well as in this thesis.

However, this thesis, in its own way, does contribute to critiques of Gibson-Graham’s work. Aguilar (2005) suggests that despite their centering of ethics and decision making, “an explication of ethics and of the ambiguities and tensions of ethical choices in limit situations is not provided” (27). Indeed, one of the things I struggle with in Gibson-Graham’s work is the lack of detail or pause in conflict or difficulties. What I sought to show in this thesis is some of the “internal life” of such difficulties. Doing so has left me feeling rather sympathetic to not showing the internal life of conflict, as it can be so messy and non-linear as to be unbelievable. It is difficult to write a sort of “play-by-play” of conflict, especially because individual and group dynamics can be open to change and difficult to summarize. Chapter 4 was the best example of this in that it attempted to show the process *and* the ambiguities *and* tensions of the group. As one early reader of the text notes, the result is a text where it can seem like “nothing happens” for the first 20 or pages of the chapter! (When in fact, the work of describing the non-linear and sporadic mess of decision-making in a way that seeks to show its ambiguities or tensions was exactly the task I set out to do). What I found was that some of the short ends of even our best analytical tools (feminist ones) and ethical guides. For anyone involved in radical activist circles, this will not come as a surprise, as oppression within

radical communities is much talked about. What I tried to tease out was where the very specific failures of our feminist analysis: The gender analysis that members of the E-PAZ had was spot-on; but where they (myself included) made a mistake was thinking that such an analysis could provide an ethics, as in, what to do next. I leave the thesis very much interested in that space (vacuum?) between analysis and ethics, as I think it deserves more attention in feminist and postcapitalist thinking alike.

I wrote in the last chapter my own political-intellectual challenges with thinking with Gibson-Graham on grasping the possible rather than the limits to the possible. By doing so, I sought to show something of the struggle to loosen the bounds of imagination that is second nature in predominant modes of criticality. Such a struggle is far more than personal. I did not put it this way in that chapter, but reconsidering the ways the coordinators disavowed their everyday practices was difficult to write. I worried that readers might misconstrue my focus as one that ultimately was suggesting the coordinators were just “dupes”. This was the take of Aguilar (2005), who worries that Gibson-Graham’s focus on “reluctant subjects” will be a new version of false consciousness. This is an important caution since claims of false consciousness have a long history in writing by radicals and radical scholars. Common examples would be calling working class people “dupes” for supporting right-wing politicians like Thatcher or people living in the third world “accepting” totalitarian regimes. The idea of “false consciousness” is a blame-the-victim concept. Chapter 5, where I write about the coordinator’s changing their minds about Catalyst and taking up a reading of the organization organized by paranoid thinking and neoliberal dictates certainly could be said to veer similarly close to such an analysis. As I was writing and rewriting that

chapter I certainly worried that readers might jump to the conclusion that the coordinator's were "duped" – or read that that was my claim. I hope what I've shown there is what others drawing on a Foucaultian understanding of power and subject have long insisted: that subjects are an effect of discourse, and, non-unitary. This means that even if or when the coordinators are "duped", this is not a static condition. What I was interested in teasing out was the political consequences of such a moment. First, certainly that moment was powerful and strongly felt by everyone in the room, myself included. Second, there were two components that held some possibility and hope: one was that the feeling of despair and desperation, as all-consuming as it was, still left the coordinator's open to other ways of seeing Catalyst; the other was that what was lost in that moment was the ability to imagine otherwise – even to imagine that their own practices that supported activities outside of the funder-approved ones mattered. I focused on the latter component, but more work could be done looking at such moments. Despite that, I hope what the chapter showed was that not only were the coordinators "reluctant subjects" but that being reluctant was anchored in discourse. Such an acknowledgment goes against the classic conception of "dupes", as a concept that individualized actors or groups of people and represented them as static, as outside of and in control of discourse. My take was that is it very easy to end up at that moment when the coordinators were sure that Catalyst was "band-aid" and only band-aid. Gibson-Graham's work allowed me to stay a little bit outside of that vortex. But this too took work, both analytical and emotional. My attempt to produce a rereading in that chapter was an analytical exercise aimed at returning the empirical bits I saw at Catalyst as well as imagine other activities that could be pursued should people connected to the organization.



In the remainder of the conclusion I return to the core elements that make up a postcapitalist politics – a politics of language, of the subject, and of collective action. Despite many of its failures, I’m interested in reflecting on the contributions the thesis does make to a project of postcapitalist politics, widely construed.

### *A politics of language*

Throughout the thesis, I took an interest in the impact of capitalocentric economic ideas on alternative economic projects. Although personally distraught and often frustrated by the negative impacts of capitalocentrism, the more important illustration was to show how capitalocentric notions shaped discussion and indeed action. It was also important to show how ideas (and talk) were buttressed with various things (spreadsheets, formulas, contribution agreements), and showing how ideas and materials worked together, so to speak. Pointing to the ways capitalocentrism works – employing gender power, citing economic truisms, via assuming the power of being a “knowledgable” person – is markedly different than putting the blame on “capitalism”.

At the same time, I sought to highlight the ways capitalocentric talk, discourse and even affective energies were heterogeneous. Capitalocentrism did not rule all even as it shaped how noncapitalist and alternative economic projects were described, performed or evaluated. Although difficult to see at times, otherwise possibilities were often there, present, and underway. Importantly, the thesis described some of the capillaries of capitalocentrism without falling into a trap that saw it everywhere.

The form or perhaps more accurately the “expressions” of capitalocentrism were not monolithic. Instead, they were localized and attuned to the specifics of any situation. This is not to say we did not witness more generic expressions of capitalocentrism. But in

its more general form, capitalocentrism was often the (rather blasé) “analysis” that capitalism ruled all, or that the power of capitalism was inescapable or inevitable. This stance may have been popular – oft said! – particularly at the E-PAZ; the power of such an analysis was undeniable, its reach and lasting effect was not. This is not surprising since blasé statements about capitalism do not have much to say, analytically. Instead, general capitalocentrism was more destructive emotionally and affectively. It was often the expression of burnout and a confirmation and exacerbation of burnout. When such a stance dominated, often missed were opportunities for precise and particular (rather than general) analysis, such as starting productive conversations about social relations, meaning and ways of proceeding. Hold backs where expressions of capitalocentrism dominated were not, however, unshakable.

#### *A politics of the subject*

My analysis underscored why academics and activists should be concerned with the ways economy is gendered (raced, classed and so on) as well as how it is made through more concrete knowledge practices (spreadsheets, formulas). But, as I hope the example of the “social group” described in Chapter 4 illustrated, having a gendered or other political analysis is often not enough to create or nurture social relations. There is also the issue of how to practice that knowledge / analysis in place. As the example of those I called the social group at the E-PAZ illustrated, our analysis stopped once we accomplished it. We failed to recognize that we needed to push it further – to insist upon its hearing as a matter of concern with in the decision-space of the cooperative. This is not to lay blame on the social group<sup>232</sup>, but it is to see a failure of openness to allow others to listen in a new way or become otherwise. It was only once the concerned

changed – when the question became “Do you want to be a member of this cooperative?” – that the under-the-surface us-and-them dynamics was loosened. Hyper-criticality, the kind that Eve Sedgwick calls “paranoid thinking”, is also often not helpful for figuring out what to do. When combined with the “all or nothing” end-point of capitalocentric thinking, paranoid thinking is certainly not helpful for assessing what can be done or for building relations with others.

Gibson-Graham offer a wonderful metaphor of becoming in the context of making community economies: describing it as “the work of stitching”. My contribution to a postcapitalist conversation stems from my focus on groups and a focus on all the effort that can go into just *one* stitch. Gibson-Graham’s work has been criticized for being focused on the micro; my criticism of their work would be that they do not spend enough time telling us the details of “hold backs” or the work of stitching! That is, although much of Gibson-Graham’s *A Postcapitalist Politics* is about the difficulties of seeing economy otherwise and becoming other economic subjects, the slow motions of change are largely passed over. This works for their text, with all its (beautiful) theoretical elaboration and wondering. My interest in looking at the slow, often painful, details stemmed from having been involved in activist movements and spaces in my pre-graduate school days. Although these were politically formative and the source of some life-long friends, they were also emotionally taxing and incredibly judgmental<sup>233</sup> sites. Knowing how to fix the world by “smashing capitalism” was proclaimed *ad nauseum*. Not knowing about “the economy” and not having *the* answer about how to achieve economic justice was a thing to be ridiculed. This was alienating and depressing. For a few of my friends, who were interested in economic justice but who felt they were “not cool enough” for radical

spaces, it was exclusionary. Although on the one hand these spaces were politically affirming (for where else is anyone talking about capitalism or economic injustice?) – “the muck”<sup>234</sup> was what I wanted to deal with in this project head on<sup>235</sup>. In this text, I wanted to write about the “blah” without becoming blah. Much of this could go under the subheading of the politics of language of course, but it is also potently about the politics of the subject. “Muck” in its various guises gets personal: again think of the gendered silencing in Chapter 2. I have not aimed to offer definitive solutions or elongated analyses to the examples of sexism in the text, instead including them as part of the description of communities forging of otherwise economies. The examples of sexism therefore stand as “mere” record; many members of the E-PAZ (from which the examples were largely drawn) are well aware of the sexism<sup>236</sup>. Part of my reasoning for this – against, say, turning my attention more fully to the role of sexism and or its relationship to capitalocentrism or postcapitalism – is that I do not take the examples of sexism as somehow unique or special to the efforts or the groups themselves. As noted in the text, I understand such instances as common and in that sense, banal<sup>237</sup>.

Inclusion of unsavory activities and “muck” (in any of its guises) was also a political choice on my part. As a reader of alternative economies and community economic development projects, I find that much of the popular / non-fiction literature tends toward celebration and how-to<sup>238</sup>. Perhaps this is so because authors of alternative economies and CED are also often advocates of these endeavors, putting them in a position of showing the best possible “face” of alternative economies. Perhaps critical communities have undeveloped ways to produce (self-)critique that is not dismissive of their efforts. Whatever the case may be for individual authors, in this thesis I wanted to

look at and analyze those moments I did not know what to make of at the time. This included looking at (some of) the muck and unsavory activities in ways that I hoped would not just “right off” either project. My account was not a simple accounting of benefits and drawbacks, but aimed instead at the complex ethical make-up of social relations and ideas at each site. Where I remain without answers, ethical conundrums are left on the page, so to speak; material others can certainly pick-up. Not having an answer for some of these quandaries is unconventional since academic writing is all about making claims to knowledge or what to think. In contrast, I would submit that when our doubts, “hold backs”, uncertainly and the like are allowed to sit on the page, the contribution made is its description of world. How to respond creatively and effectively to a heritage of hatreds like sexism, racism and colonialism is part of the internal struggle that many of those at the E-PAZ actively struggle, for example.

Although I was not shy about sharing my postcapitalist perspectives (including giving a few workshops on Gibson-Graham’s work at a local free-school), any postcapitalist influence I had within either site was (or: seemed) negligible. The long gestation period between when I finished the fieldwork and completed a draft of the thesis gave me time to figure out how I could use postcapitalist politics in a productive way.

I often wondered during the writing of this thesis whether my affection for Gibson-Graham’s work would be read or prejudged as a strike against the criteria that a dissertation “contribute to original knowledge”; for a long time, that is, through the writing of multiple drafts, I came to realize that not paying homage was actually a barrier to exploring how my “here and now” (specifically the fieldwork I had done and the work

I continued to do in the two organizations) was a place where postcapitalist ideas could flourish. It was not until I stated clearly the intellectual gratitude and highlighted rather than downplayed using their work as a kind of touchstone that I felt free enough to converse with their work while remaining close to the conditions of my own geography. In the most personal way, the thesis is an archive of my own becoming.

*A politics of collective action*

The thesis recounted what were often the complicated and convoluted backdrop of the dramas of misunderstanding, politicking and “bad group dynamics”. I tried to do so in a way that is open, honest and hopeful. Collaboration with others is not only tricky – it can be hard. To be clear, collaboration can be fantastic and life-affirming in so many ways, but as encountered throughout this ethnography, collaborating is not straightforward, the collective life of relationships within groups is often neither rational nor linear. Collaboration can often expose deep-seated sexism, racism and other forms of hatred that make up our social world, and work to hinder our relationships, and hence, our creative impulses. As one of the chapters contends, we can also be ill-prepared to practice living the demos of democracy. These and other challenges can and do trip up collaborations. How to usher in the creative, enlivening, and affirmative work of feminist, poststructuralist, and queer theorists will, in this respect, continue to be a productive focus of postcapitalist scholarship.

This thesis attests that within “alternative” and functioning “community economic development” communities, powerful blockages come from within. Navigating amongst “cannot” ideas is key. Although Gibson-Graham’s work was developed from the many experiments that they encountered or help to create through their action-research projects,

the gritty material is somewhat absent from their work. What I have shown in this thesis is that small and often difficult moments can provide exemplary material connected to “big questions”; in response to critics of Gibson-Graham’s postcapitalist politics is necessarily local (read: parochial) this is to say that structuralism (read: strong theory) is not the only route to worldly concerns.

In this thesis, knowledge and the methods that go into naming, gathering and ordering objects for knowledge is not the lone purview of researchers, making knowledge itself a matter of collective action. The most apparent example of this was found in Chapter 5, when we watched the coordinating staff of Catalyst create a representation of the organization that ignored the many activities happening within the organization in favour of a representation that privileged funder-approved activities (and therefore, neoliberal labour market policy). This is important, especially in the context of the coordinators “discovering” the shortcomings of the labour market policies that provided the funding for the training program. As I argued, such a representation narrowed the scope of action the organization enjoyed in intervening in the local labour market. Importantly, the coordinator’s critique of Catalyst involved what I described as a spatial narrowing of the organization’s scope. One result of this was that “suddenly,” it was as if the coordinators were the most important actors at Catalyst – in the sense of being imbued with agency. How knowledge is recognized as such, and how it organized with other bits of knowledge affects what is possible to think. The thesis gave opportunity to witness the making of mainstream “accepted” economic knowledge as well as efforts to make “otherwise” knowledge.

The heart of collective action is of course social relations. When Roelvink and Gibson-Graham define the community economy, they write that “The community economy is ... not an economic form but rather the praxis of co-existence and interdependence” (2009, 147). This notably places emphasis on the ways that social relations make “economy”, rather than a vision of “the economy” as in any way prior, separate or removed from interactions among human and non-human others (ibid).

### **In conclusion**

Examining the ability to think about and act on economic possibility was a productive and creative endeavor. It was also a demanding one. Otherwise ideas had to be championed, risked, and nurtured. This was true in the field – and it was true in the writing of the thesis. The task I set out for myself in the preceding chapters was not to suggest the correct way of looking and enacting practices in these two community economies. Although I do not shy away from making some suggestions – most notably in Chapter 5 – I do not believe that these are the only ways to do community economy. Or, to push this further, I do not think that the issues and topics I tackle in the thesis are the only ones worthy of such attention. Like Gibson-Graham and others building and writing about community economies, this thesis was hopeful and engaged in theoretical practices that aimed to examine and expand our economic and ethical imaginations (Gibson-Graham 1996, xxi). I started where my friends and colleagues were at in the world because, of course, this was where I was at too. Writing a thesis about my / our efforts offered time for reflection and analysis; and space to dwell longer with difficult topics and circumstances that although fleeting did not seem all that unique. Along the way, because I wrote the first drafts of this thesis while still heavily involved at each site, the



thesis also played a role in how I interacted and (I hope) added to these places. This is important because the biggest contribution the thesis offers is the ethnographic traces of economic possibility: nuanced stories of encountering possibility. For those who are no longer sustained by idea(l)s of utopia and want to do without a “give me a blueprint”<sup>239</sup> world, training our imaginations to find, make and nurture economic possibility becomes a critical ethical task (Arendt 2003). With varied approaches, this thesis sought to work through the details, emotions and the practices of thinking otherwise: the art of forging new beginnings.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The use of “community” in the term “community organization” is highly contested and, in some aspects, controversial (see Herbert 2005). I use it here as shorthand to refer to the two sites in which this ethnography is based. How each organization thought about or enacted “community” varied. Only the non-profit organization, Catalyst Inc., described itself as a “community organization”. For the other organization, “community” referred to both the immediate actors involved in the incorporation of the cooperative as well as to a larger community of radical activists, anarchists, musicians, artists / performers and worker cooperators.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that I am not a scholar of Marxism or post-Marxism, and certainly not a trained expert in either area. This, no doubt, impacts my reading of Gibson-Graham’s postcapitalism. I approached this research project not with a sense of “knowingness” about capitalism, Marxism, post-Marxism or postcapitalism but with a curiosity about people in “alternative” and “CED” spaces interact with ideas and notion of “economy”: to my mind, one can ask the latter without full knowledge of the former. I approached writing the thesis relying heavily for (post-)Marxist insight from Gibson-Graham, and theoretical “umph” from authors whose “strategies” or “ways of proceeding” spurred my analysis or creative impulses.

<sup>3</sup> This itself is not a new idea or unique in the world of contemporary economic geography and its related disciplinary interests. See, for instance, the work of Stephen Renick and Richard Wolff as well as the scholarship that has grown up around what is called Post-modern Marxism; see also the work of Mitchell 2002 and Gidwani 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Page references to *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* cite the 2006 re-issue of the volume by the University of Minnesota Press. Henceforth, I refer to the text as “1996” so as not to confuse it with their second volume, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, also released by University of Minnesota Press in 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Instead, using the example of “place”, a “language of place” “signifies the possibility of understanding local economies as places with highly specific economic identities and capacities rather than simply as nodes in a global capitalist system. In more broadly philosophical terms, place is that which is not fully yoked into a system of meaning, not entirely subsumed to a (global) order; it is that aspect of every site that exists as potentiality. Place is the “event in space,” operating as a “dislocation” with respect to familiar structures and narratives. It is the unmapped and unmoored that allows for new moorings and mappings. Place, like the subject, is the site and spur of becoming, the opening for politics.” (2008, 662)

<sup>6</sup> A common example of this might involve “seeing a challenge as an opportunity rather than a hurdle”.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 2, “Capitalism and Anti-essentialism: An Encounter in Contradiction” in *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* for a history of the theoretical efforts after Althusser and post-Marxism that troubled notions of *the* economy as “a unified capitalist space” (32, note 15).

<sup>8</sup> After the hey-day of anti-globalization protests passed, I had a hard time finding a way to be an economic activist. But Gibson-Graham’s work gave me new hope and new ways to think about life after capitalism that was, as they like to put it, in the here and now.

Their work suggested that I could shed, finally, that sometime identity as a glum wannabe anti-capitalist activist: bored by so much of the rhetoric of such movements and (disappointingly) aware of the futility of just being “against capitalism”. This is what first attracted me to their work and the work of other postcapitalist scholars.

<sup>9</sup> Specific characteristics about the neighbourhoods and city are contained in relevant chapters.

<sup>10</sup> I discuss what I mean by the “ground of the possible” in the lead up to the chapter descriptions below.

<sup>11</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>12</sup> It was an organization I had been a member of a decade before.

<sup>13</sup> Catalyst Retrofits Inc. is a pseudonym.

<sup>14</sup> Before becoming a permanent employee, I did two small research / policy papers for Catalyst. The first involved an analysis of neighbourhood characteristics (income, housing stock), and the second wrote the application for a national business award for energy efficiency innovation.

<sup>15</sup> I have taken the liberty of differentiating these terms in this manner given that the meaning of “participant observation” is notably difficult to pin down (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994, 248).

<sup>16</sup> When I first started research at Catalyst, copies of my consent form, which described the study, were posted on their bulletin boards.

<sup>17</sup> Or at least trying to do so: Like a lot of action / participant researchers, at the E-PAZ, it was always hard to know where the research began and where it ended (Petray 2012).

<sup>18</sup> By luminous description Katz means something more than style but that certainly includes style.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to highlight that the resulting text is an interpreted endeavour since this is not the only approach that can generate knowledge via ethnography. The most common other to interpretation is perhaps deduction, or the testing of theories (See Wilson and Chaddha 2009 for a nice description of this kind of ethnography). Indeed, it seems that most controversies regarding the validity of ethnography revolve around questions of replicability and testing (see Wilson and Chaddha 2009), which my study makes no attempt to do.

<sup>20</sup> My approach recalls that one of the lessons from the so-called textual turn in the social sciences, and in ethnography more specifically, is that ethnography and academic texts are replete with literary devices, conventions and, indeed, cultural bias (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1973; Pratt 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Geertz provides a laundry list of what he calls textual “pretensions” that can try to do away with or ameliorate the fact that ethnography is “the describer’s descriptions”, including “text positivism” (reliance and grounding on verbatim passages); “dispersed authorship” (the dream of “heteroglossial” ethnographical discourse where participant and author “speak” within the text); confessionalism or “authorial self-inspection” as a way of minimizing “bias” (145).

<sup>22</sup> It could be argued that no description is possible without some of this “picture making”, but what I mean here is more specifically using this as a textual device to produce what Geertz calls “being there”.

<sup>23</sup> By affect, I mean the sharing of emotive energy, either through intonation, leaning in or other kinds of swaying or comportment.

<sup>24</sup> Some self-styled radicals within the E-PAZ decided the social committee's use of the word "insurrection" in our fundraiser – titled "Dance, dance, insurrection. Another property is possible" – was political sacrilege. On the early morning of the day of the fundraiser, they sent an anonymous email over the E-PAZ's listserv threatening to "to slash the bike and car tires of those attending" (E-PAZ listserv, 27 Nov 2010). The audacity of not being able to take a joke in the context of the sheer exhaustion from putting on a large event with a four person team! And to be accused of political sacrilege! It was more than a little insulting.

<sup>25</sup> Things would change once I was employed by Catalyst. My personal stake in the "difficult bits" of intervening in the local labour market was limited, and in that way, impersonal. This isn't bad or limiting – at least in the sense that my research project did not set out to study the emotional lives of people working to take back the economy. But it was a contrast. And it was in stark contrast to the role of Catalyst's coordinators, whose jobs and passions were with the community of largely young Aboriginal men with whom they were working.

<sup>26</sup> Despite this, my questions, their answers, and our conversations did not lend itself to making easy comparisons between organizations ("types") or between projects.

<sup>27</sup> A punk-house is a house rented (or in rare cases, owned) by a collective of punks; the house serves as both a home and as a meeting (or in this case, workshop) space.

<sup>28</sup> Callon is writing specifically about science in the text quoted.

<sup>29</sup> An "actant" is "any entity endowed with the ability to act" (Callon 1995, 54). In addition to human and non-human actors, an actant can be the created object that then can act. Callon gives the following example: "Before Einstein wrote to Roosevelt, politicians could not want the atom bomb; afterward, they wanted it very much. The actant 'Roosevelt-who-wants-the-atom-bomb...' is a 'laboratory creation' and a specific 'actant' that is distinct from the man Roosevelt (54). 'Items of concern' is Latour's phrase for the objects produced by the coming together of various human and non-human actants.

<sup>30</sup> "Stammering" and "not-knowing" are Gibson-Graham's descriptions of affective-and-literal states, especially in a group setting.

<sup>31</sup> By "interpretive devices offered in psychoanalysis" I mean, for example, the notion, used in Chapter 4, of "psycho-analytic observations" as described by Freud (1975).

<sup>32</sup> My discussion of psychoanalysis is minimal, reflecting the extent of its use in the thesis.

<sup>33</sup> My use the term "analytic grid" is borrowed from Foucault, which he used to describe the non-universal, inert conceptions of power-knowledge-truth he brought to his studies of discourse. He writes: "no one should ever think that there exists *one* knowledge or *one* power, or worse, *knowledge* or *power* which would operate in and of themselves. Knowledge and power are only an analytical grid" (1997b, 52). Likewise, if the thematic I work with is "possibility", these are further specified by the analytic grids "possibility / knowledge" and "possibility / knowledge".

<sup>34</sup> I discuss the E-PAZ in the third person for writerly distance.

<sup>35</sup> I borrow the phrase “hold backs” from Gibson-Graham, which they use to describe hesitations, doubts or barriers to acting otherwise or belief that otherwise economies are possible. “Hold backs” often refer to any personal, psychological, conceptual or emotional hesitation.

<sup>36</sup> The phrases in quotation marks indicate common paraphrases at the E-PAZ.

<sup>37</sup> In this, the Marxist heritage of Gibson-Graham’s postcapitalism is clear: they view economic relations as *social* relationships.

<sup>38</sup> This would include recuperating political discourses that were made but which have been buried.

<sup>39</sup> “Thinking otherwise” does not imply that the ideas must be new, only “otherwise” to capitalocentric ones. The definition allows me to talk about things that do not quite exist. The “otherwise” in the sense that it can be the spark, but not the fire.

<sup>40</sup> This list does not have to be thought of as exclusive or complete.

<sup>41</sup> Conceptually, the notion of “thinking otherwise” does not grant to proper knowledge that its “tests of time” or predominance thereby meets any ethical test. I take from Gibson-Graham that the sociality of decision-making, context and geography of how we do economy cannot be accepted as ethical in advance; what is ethical must instead be a part of the negotiation. I should point out that the “usual” ways of economic thinking are not by default wrong, nor necessarily ethically bankrupt. The same can be said for the products (results) of “thinking otherwise”. Rather, my aim is to examine how it is that we can pay attention to the processes of interdependence, negotiation and enlivening of economic possibility, *some* of which can be “railroaded” (that is, blocked) by “easy” recourse to these so-called “usual” ways of thinking.

<sup>42</sup> That is, outside of academic or policy-oriented contexts, and as in this case, not stipulated in full by marked “experts” (real estate agents and other “experts”).

<sup>43</sup> How the “outside” could be reconciled with the “inside”; and, more especially, how the “inside” could and should be determined was part of the larger, convoluted, and ultimately undecided conversations members and the larger community had.

<sup>44</sup> I refer here to a well-known anarchist adage – “property is theft” – originally from the French anarchist Proudhon (circa 1840s), who argued for the abolition of the concept of property and the sovereign rights legally enshrined therein.

<sup>45</sup> The basis of unity was a statement of principles that united the E-PAZ as a group. Its original version was penned by the owner of the building. After incorporation, some individual members of the Co-op group tried to modify the basis of unity for the new group, but agreement on the principles and language was not found.

<sup>46</sup> Discussions of rent (and to a lesser extent property) are still rare in the growing diverse economies literature. This is not surprising, given the youth of field. More broadly, considerations of rent and property are absent because not many people or organizations have the opportunity to attain (legally-owned) property. The example is discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>47</sup> Notably, Massey and Catalano were working with a non-reductionist Marxist perspective. I thank Jamie Peck for pointing this out to me.

<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the capitalization of land and real estate markets and what they mean “on the ground” came into the E-PAZ’s discussions often. One pertinent example was when a

member tenant expressed the desire to explore a condo option (i.e. forming a condo association instead of a cooperative), which would allow this particular tenant (itself a cooperative business) to show they had equity investments that, in turn, could make them eligible for receiving certain federal grants or to secure future financing from the bank. The condo option was contentious and was ultimately dismissed, but the example certainly illustrates the mundane ways that the real estate market has become financialized – that is, tied to other forms of financing, including monies provided by granting agencies – all of which can have tremendous effects for the viability of small businesses.

<sup>49</sup> In other words, they had no theories of the world or economy to help them understand that their “pebbles” (ideas) were evidence that the capitalist essentialism they espoused was not the lone way to “do property”. In this, their ideas were theoretically positioned as meaningless.

<sup>50</sup> Though a five-month negotiation process, the structure of the Co-op settled on does not allow for the accrue of equity for members. Indeed, the governing structure of the Cooperative would be best described as an anti-profit machine, including the common governing instrument that if the Cooperative dissolves, any profit made from the sale of its assets goes to another cooperative. (This is not an uncommon practice for cooperatives, and is enshrined in the province’s Cooperative Incorporation Act.)

<sup>51</sup> As incorporated, if members wish to leave the Co-op, they receive their membership share (\$1,000), but not the proportional amount their organization has paid on the mortgage principle.

<sup>52</sup> Allowing investment shares and setting returns on investment shares at higher than 0% would not come about until almost two years after the discussions in which the Cooperative was incorporated and in which the discussions on rent took place.

<sup>53</sup> In this chapter, I do not deal with the pros and cons with this structure, nor do I delve into the important issue of the ways that financing and grants for the kind of enterprises that exist in the building (small businesses, worker cooperatives) may be dependent and therefore deeply entangled with the capitalization of real estate.

<sup>54</sup> It was not simply that the original owner determined rent on the basis of dialogues with tenants – word around the building also has it that he consulted professionals in the making of the rent numbers: so that it is neither just that rent rates were determined in a loosely understood “collective” manner or by employing professionals to give their expert opinion on “fair rates”.

<sup>55</sup> The library had been in existence since just after the building was first purchased by the original title owner, so it is likely that the rental rate reflects this. It is also likely that the original title owner had also been involved in the radical political organization. It too had been around as long as the library (1996-97).

<sup>56</sup> When I began drafting this chapter, there were a number of liens against the building because the fire escape was not up to code. The repairs needed were in fact minor, making the issue less about the physical safety of those who use the building than the ability of the state to impose liens.

<sup>57</sup> This was disconcerting for some, and it stemmed from inexperience with the practice of making projections, which are fictional numbers.

<sup>58</sup> As the institutional structure was solidified, the Co-op would turn to issues related to financing.

<sup>59</sup> This is a paraphrase from one of the meetings discussed later in the chapter.

<sup>60</sup> I believe he created the spreadsheets well before our discussions. They were not examined by the group before these meetings.

<sup>61</sup> Multiple versions of these spreadsheets were constructed by *D* and sent across the E-PAZ listserv, often with accompanying explanations provided by him.

<sup>62</sup> We had paid for the creation of this document, as it is a document that bankers require when they evaluate their risk in granting a mortgage.

<sup>63</sup> Referring to those whom by this time had indicated they were not interested in becoming members of the cooperative.

<sup>64</sup> The “basis of unity” had been a long-standing, if largely displaced contention: it was one of the topics that kept getting pushed off the agenda, the victim of something we called “time constrains”.

<sup>65</sup> Readers can return to my account of existing rents, above, as an example of how the “who” of the spaces are judged: there is a history of “who art more radical than thou?” that haunts participants’ use of the word “politics”. In this context, the desire to avoid “politics” is understandable.

<sup>66</sup> In light of Chapter 4, this alternative question – which centered the “we” of the cooperative over any individual member organization – is could serve as an early example of “being / becoming cooperative”.

<sup>67</sup> Eight to ten participants was the norm around this time. Two regulars (from this period) were not in attendance and one highly involved participant was working out of town. There were also up to two regular “contributors” to the discussions / decisions being made via the Cooperative’s listserv. Meeting minutes from this period suggest that meetings were usually 2.5 hours in duration.

<sup>68</sup> The meeting marked the only time that someone from his organization attended a Cooperative meeting.

<sup>69</sup> Minutes were distributed though the E-PAZ listserv, and his organization was subscribed.

<sup>70</sup> This is true: the worker co-ops all rely on their members volunteering unpaid hours to sustain their businesses. Likewise, the elder performs his role within his organization as a volunteer. However, in the context of the E-PAZ, his organization would not necessarily be grouped as a volunteer organization because the main office staff are (well) paid positions. If the E-PAZ decided that it wanted to explore further the idea of “discounts” for volunteer organizations, they would have needed to explore further the different kinds of labour within organizations.

<sup>71</sup> In the defense of those giving the summary (myself included), we were not given much space by the elder to explain the content or concerns in which our framework stemmed.

<sup>72</sup> I am summarizing the elder’s position based on his comments at the meeting.

<sup>73</sup> Thus, there had been discussion of whether we would use one method across the board or whether we could agree to using multiple methods.

<sup>74</sup> I did not interview the elder as a follow up to this meeting. I should note here that although I was “victim” of the elder’s sexism (see below), I’m much more interested in

the sexist space constituted by becoming the women-social than his individual sexist acts. This chapter is interested in how the some ideas about rent (particularly those that are “otherwise”) become positioned as “beyond the pale” via the discursive connection made between “the women-social” and the unreasonableness of (“girly”?) irrational numbers (i.e. all those not based on the market rate assessment numbers).

<sup>75</sup> That the anger was directed at me felt shocking for its unexpected quality, in the way that one can feel “affronted” after tripping in public. As I go on to describe, it was also shocking because it became clear the anger was motivated by gender power and sexism.

<sup>76</sup> This is a phenomenological description and notably was not my first response. See my footnote below, which speaks to the “internal dialogue” I had during the meeting.

Although this moment of sexism is important as it provides what perhaps is the starkest example of one way in which otherwise ideas are placed outside the realm of possibility, I did not think it was necessary to interview other participants at the meeting about what was going on; as noted later, the sexist violence was acknowledged at the end of the meeting, although it was acknowledged, I think, in a very liberal feminist manner (described as a problem of the number of women present rather than the discursive place that women and their ideas were “placed”). That said, this kind of sexism seems common enough to be adequately described as banal. So too is the awkward (non)response to covert sexism. That said, the example of “covert sexism” that I account in this chapter warrants further feminist analysis: I would suggest that although the phrase “covert sexism” begs the question “covert to whom?,” what to do – how to respond – to instances of covert sexism are undeveloped in feminist discourse. Given that such an experience of covert sexism is common – at least in terms of its ability to silence or disregard – in enjoining to write this narrative what surprised me the most was how difficult it was to describe it outside of terms that seemed to me encased in a victim or naïve narrative. I used footnotes to supplement the text to show how although I remained present at the meeting (except for a brief couple of minutes I left to cry – only then about 45 minutes after the outburst), I was also working through the “shock” of the elder’s anger. Point being that it did not take long to have a feminist analysis of what happened and what was happening. Why the event matters – in other words, as it is used to alight a particular “theoretical practice” concerning otherwise ideas is – however, distinct from such an analysis. It also does nothing to advance the cause of possible actions or responses.

<sup>77</sup> There would also be some efforts on part of the larger group for the facilitator (the other woman in the room) to be acknowledged by the elder. There was likewise effort to create “calm” after the outburst. The minute taker was perhaps alluding to some of these efforts when he sent out the minutes of the meeting a couple of days later: explaining some of the gaps in his (quite detailed!) minutes, he wrote “During some parts of the meeting things got kind of hazy” (“Aug 24, 2010”, email over listserv, 26 August 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Of course, it is funny to expect a response from others to covert sexism when I never know how to respond to it. This may explain why other participants at the meeting could (awkwardly) defend the facilitator and reject the sexist treatment she was receiving but could not do so for me in my position as the woman-social.

<sup>79</sup> To elaborate: throughout the meeting, I was having an internal (private) struggle, one which (seemed to me) to eclipse and take over any contribution I might make to the



discussion. Speaking became more and more difficult as the meeting progressed. I would decide that I could not speak again – even though running through my mind was that I *must* speak (– lest sexism win!). But every attempt to speak and to “take up space” seemed to fail. And, at a certain point, I did indeed stop speaking – I literally could not open my mouth. I became, as the meeting progressed, silenced. A few days after the meeting I wrote some notes on the experience that included the following: “I wanted to leave the meeting. (I did in fact leave momentarily, a while after the “fury” had passed, to shed a few tears.) But I wanted to refuse to leave the meeting too, not wanting to concede the space I took up. My body, it seemed, was my last stance.”

<sup>80</sup> What was extraordinary about the “thumbing” was that with such a gesture, the person speaking did not actually say anything about “the social”. The “thumb” towards me apparently was enough to express the content of “the social”. They were talking about rent and the methodology of arriving at rates.

<sup>81</sup> The formal consensus decision-making model has at its heart contention. That is, those participating in consensus-based decisions strive to bring contention and disagreement to the forefront of discussion. It becomes something else – a site of bodily injury and gendered violence – when the person rather than the idea is signaled / made contentious. Bodily- or “predicate”-centered violence is a long-standing issue in consensus-based decision making communities.

<sup>82</sup> The purpose of the Gibson-Graham chapter that I draw on here (“The Economy, Stupid!”) deconstructs the ways that the economy is both gendered (male) as an object and yet is taken as an entity that can only be ‘tinkered with’ (a notion that is also profoundly gendered). Their starting point is to extend feminist theories that question the hierarchical and gendered ordering of things to the discourses surrounding “economy talk”: “Whereas feminist theorists have scrutinized and often dispensed with the understanding of the body as a bounded and hierarchically structured totality, most speakers of “economics” do not problematize the nature of the discursive entity with which they are engaged” (1996, 96).

<sup>83</sup> “Masculine” is in scare quotes for a reason: I’m noting the absurdity of the gendering that was at work in the discussion. Referring to the market rate rent numbers as “manly rents” (below) is also to highlight *and* point out the absurdity of the web of connections between rationality—man—economy that was alighted in this example.

<sup>84</sup> My account cannot be much more detailed than this, since to examine further the subjective and constructed nature of market assessments would call for a separate research study. The comparable rental rates collected and collated by the assessor may be – and very likely are – those aimed at making a profit off tenants.

<sup>85</sup> The building assessment we received of the E-PAZ building includes photos of properties in the downtown and on the edge of the particular “arts” district in which the building is located. These are buildings the assessor deemed “comparable” to the building.

<sup>86</sup> The facilitator noted that the E-PAZ was the most anti-feminist space she had ever been a part of, and the men remaining agreed whole-heartedly and maybe a bit ashamed too. One man noted that he was happy a feminist activist group was moving into the building – hopefully, it would mean more woman at the meetings. Still unable to speak, I

was very angry at the close of the meeting that (the men) could now note the sexist violence of the meeting and their desire to make the E-PAZ a feminist(-friendly) space. (The equation that “more woman” would equal a “more feminist space” made me very angry.) I recognize now however, that perhaps like me, what to do and how to respond to the covert forms of sexism during the meeting is confounding. For instance, no man could “step up” to defend me without risking becoming the benevolent patriarch!

<sup>87</sup> His internalist construction was open to allowing personal preferences to shape any assessment that might result. He was willing, for example, to allow his preference for an office without windows to be valued “on par” with those offices that do have windows. Further, he was not interested in forcing other tenants to accept his preferences: those that don’t have windows and would evaluate the value of their space as less valuable as those with windows.

<sup>88</sup> His suggestion can be taken as a particularity. It does not say “I don’t care about not having windows therefore I don’t think this should be a factor”; instead, it says “I don’t care about not having windows, but others might so that can be taken into account”. One reading of *D*’s statement can be that his Co-op not take a discount on rent but that discounts on quality of space be available to other members. This is why I call this a particular approach to decision-making on rents. The challenge with this approach, as noted, is that it does not stay-put with a “scientific” or “one-formula-for-all” approach to the figuring of rents.

<sup>89</sup> The fact that it was *D* who both prepared the spreadsheets (market rate and otherwise) as well as offered a very “subjective approach” option speaks to the fact that there is no inevitable relation between economic knowledge and ethical economic decisions that might be made. *D* was primarily interested in working with others to negotiate a rent rate system that all could agree to.

<sup>90</sup> The rent negotiations would end up presenting two scenarios – one based on rent revenue needed on a 20 year mortgage and one based on a 30 year mortgage. The price of the building did not change: it was \$500,000, with \$60,000 owed in property taxes. So although the price did not change, subsequent discussion between those doing the rent negotiation (*F*, *G* and myself) and *D*, who was working on putting the numbers together for business plan, had to take into account that the rent revenue needed to cover operating expenses, including servicing the mortgage. This chapter is mainly concerned with the “moment” of thinking otherwise rent appear and disappear; therefore, my analysis focuses specifically on the discussions focused on rent.

<sup>91</sup> I am not suggesting that such instruments be discarded, only that they be scrutinized as one possible construction among many.

<sup>92</sup> Though their analysis of capitalist property might be quite sophisticated, it left undeveloped what otherwise property could be – it was unimaginable. This is unfortunate because their “otherwise” ideas had no discursive home.

<sup>93</sup> This is especially true within radical and anarchist academic and non-academic publishing. It is also the case within the E-PAZ’s listserv, which serves as one of the group’s forums for discussion. Unfortunately, most of the “exposure” of what are serious issues (e.g. sexism) tend not to be focused on analysis, but instead dovetail to accusations that proclaim either the non-radical character of economic experiments or accuse the

group or individuals within it as politically inauthentic (i.e. “really capitalist pigs”). (Interestingly, a common “last blow” in such exchanges rhetorically end with a statement about the “real impossibility of anything that could be anti-capitalist.”) My argument here is that there is an all-too-common opportunity lost in such exchanges for analysis and reflection.

<sup>94</sup> In this chapter, I follow local usage in that I use the term “social enterprise” to refer to a wide range of organizational forms whose revenue sources can include government funding as well as those that do not. This usage is unlike the policy and academic work coming out of the UK and Europe, which might differentiate between “social economy organizations” (or SEOs) from “social enterprises” (SEs), where the latter is (somewhat ambiguously) defined as having more of a “market orientation” (Hudson 2009).

<sup>95</sup> Defining what social enterprises are has been a major focus of the literature that has emerged (Jones and Keogh 2006; Lionais 2010; Reid and Griffith 2006; Seanor and Meaton 2007; Steyaert and Dey 2010; Steyart and Katz 2004).

<sup>96</sup> There were some good, practical reasons why a focus might be on the business of social enterprise. For example, if an audience at a learning event largely hail from charitable organizations, they (presumably) know little about running an organization with earned revenue. During the ethnographic portion of my research at Catalyst it was clear that appeals to entrepreneurial culture served a strategic political purpose, as seen in this chapter.

<sup>97</sup> Such a phenomenon, if we may call it that, is not unusual, and often noted, for instance in the UK-based literature (see references above; Mason 2012; Thompson 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Although each performance of Catalyst as a social enterprise represent a “capitalocentric” and “postcapitalist” take on social enterprise respectively, my interest is not to determine which is “more true”; from my perspective, both are. Instead, I focus on these two types of performances because each performance revolves around different conceptions of social enterprise. By calling these “performances”, I highlight that “Catalyst” (and indeed, “social enterprise”) does not just exist, but requires the work of knowledge producers, managers, spreadsheets, photographs and so on to bring Catalyst-the-social-enterprise into being.

<sup>99</sup> This is one such consequence, although whether it is the most important is not for me to determine here. My concern is not with the production of this knowledge product but the theoretical practice of “thinking social enterprise”. For this reason, the chapter doesn’t follow the network of knowledge production or affects that the resulting research paper had on local policy, or, for example, how the paper may have been taken up by policy advocates elsewhere.

<sup>100</sup> Conceptualizing social enterprise in such a way is not obvious or natural.

<sup>101</sup> Although a “postcapitalist performance” of Catalyst was not limited to the many tours the executive director and other staff gave, its “conception” of social enterprise – in terms, for example, of knowledge transfer – was limited compared to that of policy-oriented research. Another way of stating the issue, is that it was hard for some to “think” Catalyst the postcapitalist social enterprise – because postcapitalist conceptions of social enterprise do not have the same level of purchase among policy makers, advocates and developers that the “capitalocentric” conception seems to enjoy. Certainly, Catalyst’s

strangeness may have been part of its attraction of so many visitors; but its conception of social enterprise however is nonetheless subaltern (or: non-dominant), from the perspective of social enterprise policy and development. These are just a few of examples of some of the ways that how social enterprise is performed can be said to matter.

<sup>102</sup> A further development of this chapter might explore some of the ways the first “conception” is limiting and the second, fecund. The task I set for this chapter is simply that these conceptions (are made to) exist.

<sup>103</sup> There is a practical reason why this might be so. The skill sets of running a social enterprise may indeed be closer to the skill sets of running a small or medium-sized business than they are for running a non-profit or charity. An SME needs to generate revenues from their economic activities, and historically, non-profits and charities generate revenues from funders (government, private and public foundations, individual donations and so on). I do not want to trivialize the perceived or real tensions that may exist between a “business-orientation” versus a “social orientation”, or more concretely, the tension that can exist between financial goals versus social outcomes (Hudson 2009). I do question the ways that SE talk becomes enamored with the supposed mutual exclusivity that exists between the two.

<sup>104</sup> Formed in 2006 as a government-funded pilot project, by 2010 Catalyst was an independent non-profit organization.

<sup>105</sup> My use of the terms “postcapitalist” and “capitalocentrism” in this chapter should be understood as temporary organizing concepts or short-hand rather than suggestions of essentialist nature.

<sup>106</sup> Most science studies works pay much more attention to non-human devices or “actants” that go into making the world than I do here. As will be seen, I largely pay attention to the ideas or knowledges employed to cut one category from the other.

<sup>107</sup> I use the term “Catalyst-as-a-social-enterprise” throughout to highlight my focus on the “thinking of social enterprise”. It can also be noted that Catalyst could often be thought of as a “social enterprise *plus*”, the “plus” calling attention to the training program component of the organization. Catalyst could also be performed variously as “a community organization” and “an Aboriginal organization”. Some performances were more successful than others. Although this chapter does not consider how and why that is (given that my interest is on the “thinking of social enterprise”), Catalyst-the-social-enterprise was the premier object of Catalyst.

<sup>108</sup> In part because the fieldwork allowed for it: although “capitalocentric” ideas about social enterprise were common in meetings between government staff and the staff at Catalyst, no single meeting was as clearly illustrative as to the affect of capitalocentric ideas about social enterprise as the two researchers and their project of evaluation. Likewise, as in other chapters of the thesis, during the many tours I witnessed “capitalocentric” ideas sat comfortably and uncomfortably beside otherwise (or postcapitalist) ones.

<sup>109</sup> The second social enterprise was itself modeled on Catalyst.

<sup>110</sup> The researcher’s task was not simply to separate the training dollars from the revenues made through doing retrofit work. Perhaps this was because, from the government’s perspective, the training program dollars acted like a wage subsidy. Or perhaps, much

like the UK experience, the government was interested in investing in social enterprise development as a way of off-loading the costs of social service provision. In any case, it was not said how the government thought of Catalyst-the-social-enterprise, which is governed by an independent board of directors. Nor was it said how the government thought of social enterprises more generally, even if it seemed (from what the researchers said), that the government funder clearly defined a stake in Catalyst, and was interested in the idea of social enterprises more broadly.

<sup>111</sup> Although we can be sympathetic to the strategic purpose of separating the social from the enterprise for the purpose of the researcher's project (the evaluation they are undertaking requires the separation), my concern is less with this practical aspect of the performance as with how it is accomplished, in other words, through which truisms or discourses and so on.

<sup>112</sup> The phrases in quotation marks are direct quotes from the researchers as they described their project to the executive director.

<sup>113</sup> I talk about the "researchers' conception" and the "executive director's conception" of social enterprise based on how they talked about it. By this I mean more than a definition of social enterprise, but instead how they elaborated on what was "social" and "enterprising" about social enterprise and, because it was their schemata, how they related "the social" to "the enterprise".

<sup>114</sup> Although 63 per cent of local residents are formally employed, 16 per cent of area households make \$10,000 or less per year, and more than half of area residents – 66 per cent – make less than \$30,000 per year (Statistics Canada 2006). Neighbourhood levels of poverty and low income (i.e. living below low income cut off lines as defined by Statistics Canada) are high across all economic family types. The incidence of low income varies by census tract within the neighbourhood and by family type – single women and single mothers are ten to twenty percentage points more likely to be considered low income than men in most tracts. In 2005, 40 per cent of area households were spending 30 per cent or more of their income on rent – this in an area where renters predominate (70%) (Statistics Canada 2006) and where rental rates for almost all bedroom types in the area are the lowest in the city, including housing in other core areas (CMHC 2010).

<sup>115</sup> I've put "the social" in quotes and describe it as "(something called) 'the social'" because the research conversations indicates that exactly what the social is and what it refers to was not as self-explanatory as the researchers or the executive director often assumed. Its very fuzziness would lead to misunderstandings.

<sup>116</sup> On a few counts, the terms of the debate between the executive director and researchers were strained, at odds even. We could say that the executive director's perspective offered an analysis grounded in the everyday whereas the researcher's perspective was policy-oriented and empiricist, if seemingly anti-geographical, meaning they were not particularly interested in the details of Catalyst's geography. As noted, the researchers were interested in abstractions and economic analysis. For the researchers, "the social" included the training funding and the cultural funding; and although they stated that they believed the government should fund this "social", as it turned out (see below), their categorization did not meet up neatly with what was actually funded.

<sup>117</sup> The lead researcher loved this phrase and used it repeatedly.

<sup>118</sup> This was the self-description of the younger researcher. The times she expressed confusion and disagreement about the conceptual terms and the findings, her “misunderstanding” was largely attributed to her lack of experience.

<sup>119</sup> Of course, they could have asked if the social enterprise could pay for all of Catalyst’s work (training and retrofits in low-income neighbourhoods), but this might have gotten the researchers into a different kind of project (business plan research, for example) than the one they were tasked with.

<sup>120</sup> What is seen in the excerpt is not only a claim that separating the social from the economic is something of ease but, more specifically, that such categories were cut from the cloth of (something called) “productivity”. Was the work of actively inserting insulation batting into wood frames the only time trainees were “productive”, or were the cultural programs, like attending sweats, a part of making the body (and spirit) of the trainee productive? This was one instance where the lead researcher was trying to square the source of revenue (grant or earned) and the ambiguous categories “social” / “social” and “enterprise” / “production”. He tries to make the case again in the next quotation. It could not be squared and was not pursued.

<sup>121</sup> Notably, she was also asking whether “production costs” included only those activities of “actual work” (labouring) or if they also included the time Catalyst workers “prepared the body for work” (via sweats, workshops), in other words, feeding it, healing it, and so on might also be part of the “productivity equation”. She was asking, at a conceptual level, what would need to change to make the case that sweats and lunch programs could be analytically justifiable within the terms of the SROI exercise, and in terms of (government) funding of “the social”. R1 answered her question as if it was rhetorical. This was a funny moment – I almost laughed out loud because she was pointing out that their characterization of “the social” as “that what the government should pay for” was not what they had in fact used.

<sup>122</sup> This is a widely recognized problem by SE-researchers (Dey and Stevaert 2012). For an example of one attempt to numerically analyze the commercial activities and government contributions of non-profits see Kerlin and Pollak 2010.

<sup>123</sup> In the case of the bookkeeper’s wage, this was “acceptable” to both parties because the government funding did not include her services in its expense lines, which a critical managerial accounting perspective might question. After all, how *do* you process trainee in-house saving programs and payroll without a bookkeeper / accountant?

<sup>124</sup> This was a common ambiguity and point of contention in Catalyst’s administrative dealings with its government funder. Whether we attribute this confusion to the “roll out” and downloading of governance and social service provision and (/or!) the lacuna of policy (Hackworth 2007; Peck and Tinkell 2002; Peck 2001) – in this instance, which government department should be charged with supporting the development of social enterprise – is a relevant line of investigation outside the scope of this chapter.

<sup>125</sup> This is my summary of the lead researcher’s definition of what business is.

<sup>126</sup> This in itself was not what was destructive to the research exercise, since everyone in the room already knew and had been arguing over the “absoluteness” of the categories for what seemed like many, many hours. As I noted above, agreeing to continue with the

exercise meant accepting that (something called) “the social” be placed beside and apart from “the economic”, one funded by government and the other as the proper activity of “the business”. Where the plumber’s comment was destructive was his implicit notation that if all of this “beside and apart from” stuff was silly, there was something even sillier going on.

<sup>127</sup> We might also ask here why it was the plumber’s comment was more destructive than what I called the younger researcher’s incredulity. I would argue that the plumber asserted an “empiric” – private businesses are not necessarily 100 per cent productive all of the time – whereas the younger researcher called attention to a theoretical precondition of the research exercise.

<sup>128</sup> Even though the younger researcher’s and the plumber’s insights did not derail the research exercise, they put it on shaky ground. Pointedly, the younger researcher’s protests about the difficulty and violence of dividing the social from the economic, as well as her pointing to the theoretical relationship posed between the two, was difficult for her “more experienced” co-researcher to hear, but not impossible. Only keeping the task at hand front and center (“create a model”, “evaluate the model”) was the lead researcher able to force all of us to continue. For the research to continue, the distinction between “the social” and “the business” had to be maintained, even when it was found that these categories did not work.

<sup>129</sup> Statements of entrepreneurial triumphalism were *de jour* and frequent, for instance.

<sup>130</sup> Tours might be shorter or longer, depending on the time the visitor had or indeed because of the purpose for the visit. If someone came in to meet with the executive director about a specific thing (say, with a purpose of bringing board members to a meeting of other social enterprises that the visitor was trying to organize), then they might get a longer tour. If they came with the purpose that was largely extra-political to the immediacy of Catalyst’s operation or development (as in, trying to get the executive director’s advice on an upcoming public debate), their tour might be shorter. Sometimes the tours were short because the visitor was not keen. At other times, the executive director was not keen, as when a business man from Ontario who dealt in furnaces came for a meeting with the obvious purpose of trying to break into the Manitoba market. In a case like the latter, only a short tour was given before the business man was shown into the board room.

<sup>131</sup> Some guests did however visit construction sites, particularly government ministers and senior-level public servants.

<sup>132</sup> Energy poverty refers to the situation when lower-income people pay a significant portion of their household incomes on utility bills as compared to non-lower-income households (Green Communities Canada 2010).

<sup>133</sup> This may have been due to the fact that the executive director was not familiar with what economic geography was and so, I think he thought that I might be interested in only the “abstract economic”.

<sup>134</sup> Social enterprise does not enter his description *per se*, but is described instead as a “community-based approach”.

<sup>135</sup> In contrast, the more usual route for non-profit organizations when they have a new program they want to start that is not funded under existing government programs is to go

after new funding sources or other government grant programs. In the years to come (2011-2013), Catalyst would convince government that the drivers' training should be offered to the community at large as a specific employment-training initiative in low-income neighbourhoods.

<sup>136</sup> That is, in the UK, much of the push-back from SEs concerns how social enterprises are conceived or what they are expected to accomplish from the point of view of government (Mason 2002). In the UK, government has been the driver of SE start-ups. In Manitoba, start-ups have come from the grassroots.

<sup>137</sup> This too is "borrowed rhetoric" as entrepreneurialism is often placed in positive opposition to bureaucracy.

<sup>138</sup> Because earned revenue is not tied to pre-existing funding arrangements, Catalyst is free to use that revenue as it sees fit. Although their drivers' training component may not have been sustainable without some government contribution, (self-)funding the pilot gave them the outcomes (presumably higher rates of employment of exiting trainees?) to prove their case to funders.

<sup>139</sup> Targeted populations include Aboriginal peoples, new immigrants and women.

<sup>140</sup> Allison Mountz suggests that researching the "narratives of government and nongovernment employees" (624) who interpret, deliver and manage governmental policy and programs gives us a view of what we might call "the everyday state". Such an approach questions "abstract epistemological approaches" (624) that figure the state as an all-knowing or homogenous entity. Investigating an everyday state rejects the abstract qualities attributed to the State, qualities sometimes described as "ghost-like", elusive, or simply "out there" (drawing on Mitchell, 1991, cited in Mountz, 625).

<sup>141</sup> In addition, the tours are only one set of practices that are part of a larger network of practices (mainly: meetings) that the executive director engages. Given my comments here make a nod to governmentality studies, I can situate them in relation to Cadman's suggestion that the ways in which governmentality studies has developed has tended to miss an important aspect of Foucault's ruminations and analysis of government – specifically that which passes over Foucault's notion of "governmental 'counter-conducts'" and with it, a "mode of questioning" concerned on "how *not* to be governed" (Cadman 2010, 540).

<sup>142</sup> Readers can see the introductory chapter for an explanation on my use of performativity.

<sup>143</sup> Because the apology included personal calls from the facilitator to one or more of those present at the meeting it is impossible to guess quantitatively the apology's frequency. When I told some of my E-PAZ friends about my focus on the apology, they agreed with my interpretation that the apology was "particular", and for example, not akin to the impulse to apologize that we associate with the Canadian subject. Since the spell that made the apology compulsive has been broken, the apologies that have been said within the group have been of sincere and "real" guilt for actual and recognized wrongdoing. For example, in December 2012, I apologized to the group over email after a hurried and unnecessary rant on my part. What was different in that instance from what I account in this chapter is that the apology I deal with here had "no object" – or at least, not one that could be named as such.



<sup>144</sup> This means I am situating “becoming” within or amongst a group, rather than an individual. I elaborate on this in the literature review.

<sup>145</sup> There was also one sole-proprietor interested in joining the cooperative at the beginning of the formation process.

<sup>146</sup> Originally, he had stipulated that his offer was contingent on a worker cooperative being formed by tenants, but as the group of tenants who came together to discuss his proposal concluded, the amount of work involved in managing the building wasn’t enough to justify the formation of a worker cooperative. The owner was amenable to the cooperative not being a worker cooperative per se; and both he and the tenants agreed that his proposal would stand if one type of cooperative or another was formed.

<sup>147</sup> Two of the eventual member organizations moved in during the incorporation phase.

<sup>148</sup> Giving an account of this means that there will be much telling of unsavory acts – institutionalized sexism, distrust, talking behind people’s backs – which might leave most readers with the impression that the E-PAZ is an undesirable, unhealthy place. Although these stories are unsavory and perhaps don’t meet up nicely with our desired image of “alternative communities”, focusing on these unsavory aspects are necessary since they are a big part of the “hold back” to thinking about the difference between cooperative form and cooperative becoming.

<sup>149</sup> Readers will note that I use the terms and / or phrases “making subjects”, subjectification, subjecthood and so on as largely synonymous. In this chapter, and very much like Larner, I won’t worry so much about the various terms and different theoretical lineages in which concern about making subjects stem, choosing instead to situate my work within the field of postcapitalist scholarship.

<sup>150</sup> At the same time, many alternative economic identities exist: from homemaker to community worker and social entrepreneur to cooperator and volunteer. The list could go on. Gibson-Graham describe these available alternatives as “half-hearted and defensive ‘economic’ identities” (206, 77). Indeed, they put “economic” in quotation marks because these positions are understood primarily as social rather than economic identities (2006, 77). This observation is telling, and consequential, for postcapitalist politics. That is, despite the wide variety of possible positions, there may be little in terms of shared political goals across these various subject positions. The implication here is that political movements require an articulation of what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) call an antagonism, or “nodal point” in which “an alternative fixing of economic identity” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 78) could be identified, created or cultivated. Gibson-Graham are not advocating for a politics that inspires identities based on sameness, but a “shared sense of economic right” (77), a condition they note, does not currently exist.

Perhaps more challenging, is the fact that contemporary identifications occur largely in relation to a singular and stable object (Gibson-Graham 2006). Gibson-Graham’s project of mapping a diverse economy shakes up the notion that there is one singular economy and also questions a “model” or “blueprint” approach to changing economic landscapes. A big question that emerges in their work is: Can we become subjects who can identify with a conception of economy that is diverse and subject positions within it that are equally “unfixed”? And moreover, can there be a “nodal point”

versatile enough that otherwise economic identities can begin to share in a political project of “right”, while not leading their “weak theory” back to “strong” ones?

<sup>151</sup> Whether one becomes a new subject or whether a new economy is created for new subjects is an open question. Gibson-Graham’s argument is that neither is first. This is because their description and theoretical work around postcapitalist politics / futures does not assume we wake up one day to find ourselves in some kind of postcapitalist utopia. Instead, they suggest that the making of new subjects and postcapitalist economies is an iterative process.

<sup>152</sup> Although I write of becoming cooperative, becoming in the vein that I explore here is always incomplete and momentary. When I write of becoming cooperative, I do not mean this phrase to imply a completed subject. Being cooperative is not a finished state. There is no finish line.

<sup>153</sup> Psychoanalysis is a broad and highly contested field, even as ideas or concepts from its annals have made its way into fields from literature, cultural studies, political theory and so on. The usual tact in these fields is to draw on a specific cultural explanation (e.g. resentment) or concept (e.g. the fetish) that is well known and easily summarized. Although the results of such an approach can be fecund, I have chosen instead to write generally of psychoanalytic approaches and to draw upon a specialized area within contemporary psychoanalytic writing.

<sup>154</sup> I do not believe any of the E-PAZ’s mistakes are unique; hence, an analysis of the apology may have something to offer to those working in the field of cooperative education and development.

<sup>155</sup> “Parecon” being short for “participatory economics”, a utopian scheme of how to have a more just economy. Parecon advocates horizontal management and a mix of “high level” and “low level” duties as part of any job.

<sup>156</sup> Tellingly, all the people I interviewed who worked in or formally worked in a cooperative stated one version of this or another.

<sup>157</sup> To be clear, when I talk about cooperative *form*, I’m referring to the legal or incorporation status and to the ideals and principles that the cooperative form implies. In contrast, when I refer to cooperative *subjects*, I’m referring specifically to the activities or practices that enliven those principles; in other words, the activities of being cooperative.

<sup>158</sup> These sentiments were common in interviews with people who currently are or were involved in the E-PAZ as well as in everyday conversation.

<sup>159</sup> Over the course of two years, the number of people attending board meetings went from over thirty to an average of about six. The structure of the Co-op facilitated this. Yet the federation style was not the only reason for shrinking attendance: some people found meetings emotionally draining, others removed themselves because they felt that they were not involved enough in any of the current tenant groups to justify their involvement, and others cited simply not having time to continue to participate (E-Zine and personal communication). Although at least some of the reasons are not to be unexpected, there were a few people who, in retrospect, were “pushed out” by “shitty dynamics” – dynamics not unlike the one accounted in Chapter 2.

Meetings also became more frequent over the first two years: the group went from meeting monthly in the first couple of months, bi-monthly for about five months, bi-

weekly for a good part of a year and weekly in the two-plus months leading up to the actual purchase. Not everyone had the time to attend so many meetings, especially if their work and / or political activism also required (unpaid) weekly meetings. Keeping track of proposals and decisions, much of it communicated over many email threads, was exhausting; and the groups' efforts seemed snail-paced.

<sup>160</sup> Formal consensus tends to be equally uncritically celebrated *and* maligned in radical-activist and anarchist commentary. Perhaps that's where group psychology comes in; but it also speaks to its prevalence of use, its promise, and the ongoing desire of aiming to put it into practice.

<sup>161</sup> Although it would be tempting to situate some of those underlying assumptions purely in the text of the *Handbook* alone, science studies scholars have suggested that we have to examine the myriad ways particular kinds of knowledge are enlivened – how for instance rationalities are “brought to life” by particular groups of people. In the paragraphs that follow, although I call attention to the *text* of the handbook, I am also always bringing attention to the *reading* of the handbook by the group.

<sup>162</sup> The hatred (and perhaps) fear of theory is, of course, not unusual or particular to the E-PAZ group.

<sup>163</sup> Doubtful that the E-PAZ is alone in this assumption.

<sup>164</sup> The phrase and comment were said at a meeting by a rep from a worker cooperative.

<sup>165</sup> To take another example, sometimes it might be that a person not even at a meeting was tasked with an assignment, which could happen when they were the lone contact person with the current owner. Whether that person (a) didn't know about the task; (b) didn't do it or get around to doing it; or (c) perhaps didn't do the task because they didn't want to is an example of be one of those great unknowns.

<sup>166</sup> Readers should note that I am describing “the social group” not as a given collection of individuals but as “talk”. This is important to keep in mind: “the social group” was not in any way a structured group or clique; it is rather a category of convenience for the purposes of describing the social dynamics. The same can be said of “the co-op boys”, introduced below. I use “we” throughout my discussion of the social group to indicate that I was a participant in such conversations.

<sup>167</sup> One can easily appreciate the difficulty of so doing: if one of the dynamics was some people feeling “not in the know” and that some things were “unsaid”, confirming news that people were engaging in long discussions about these (and other) issues could only intensify such suspicions. I was only privy to a select and small number of such conversations (mainly because my personal E-PAZ friends largely lived in another neighbourhood, making casual “hanging out” difficult; and the demands of research and work left little time for things not properly deigned “research-related”! In the conversations that I was a part of, I recall fairly mixed groups (i.e. individuals from political organizations and worker cooperatives).

<sup>168</sup> On a few occasions, “non-meeting” casual conversations were held off-site and invites sent out to participate over the E-PAZ listserv. Likewise, two individuals at the E-PAZ did a zine project of interviews with past and present workers / activists involved in the building. The project produced two zines of verbatim interviews. These tended to concentrate of the theme of “What does the E-PAZ mean to you?” Both the invite for

social meetings to talk about the future of the E-PAZ and the zine were attempts to create discussion and unity amongst the group: a (much needed) place to talk about “theoretical” (i.e. non-practical) stuff that could not *not* arise during the project to start the Co-op and purchase the building.

<sup>169</sup> “The co-op boys” is a reference used amongst a few friends (myself included) as a shorthand to a number (4-5?) people who advocated an approach to cooperative formation as a purely technical and therefore straight-forward endeavor *and* to such an approach. The “the co-op boys” were themselves a diverse group and not a self-identified sub-group or clique. What they had in common was that building a cooperative was overwhelmingly a technical matter of incorporation, and expressed (in various ways) that rational, non-emotive discussion was possible.

<sup>170</sup> A call for “rational” discussion was a feature of meetings aimed at deciding on the cooperative structure.

<sup>171</sup> A further exposition of Rancière’s ideas about democracy might call attention to what he describes as “the practice of democracy ... dogged by an attitude of suspicion, of *looking underneath*, which relates all democratic statements to a concealed truth of inequality, exploitation or splitting” (2007, 44). In this, Rancière is concerned with two things: First, the ways that particular ideas about what democracy is have been enrolled into social science (44) and second, the shortcomings of our common critiques of either democracy’s failures or the failure to sustain democratic practice (44-5). Here, he questions the tactic of “demystification” specifically: “The indeterminate ritual of demystification continues to impose a way of thinking (and practicing) democracy on the basis of suspicion, as if it always had to be made to confess that it is not what it claims to be, and that those who practice it are perpetually deluded about what they are doing” (2007, 44). This was indeed the main critique of those who criticized “the co-op boys”.

On the folly of social science criticism of (the absence of) democracy, Rancière has the following to say: “Social science has ... always concerned itself essentially with one thing, proving the existence of inequality. And indeed in this endeavor it has been highly successful. But the fact that the science of social criticism is perpetually rediscovering inequality is to my mind precisely what makes it taking another look at the practices which set out to do just the opposite [i.e. emancipation practices]” (2007, 45).

<sup>172</sup> What he means by this is that by assuming the shared meanings of particular words – let’s take “equality” and “emancipation” as our examples – a “forced space” (in the metaphorical sense, it is “virtual, which is not to say illusory”, 50), one that is based on “the space of shared meaning”, is opened up: what those words mean, and how they are practiced and debated is a space of disagreement, in other words, “not a space of consensus” (2007, 49).

<sup>173</sup> Although my comments precede the illustration of such failures, I can not help but wonder if we would have done well to consider what we meant by democracy and democratic practice, and, additionally, how we might have engaged in a critical conversation about consensus.

<sup>174</sup> This is not to say that Rancière suggests that words are immutable or universal: elsewhere he notes “If words serve to blur things, it is because the conflict over words is

inseparable from the battle over things” (2006, 93). Instead, by “all can understand all” he means that engaging in a “democratic experience” entails

“starting from the point of view of equality, asserting equality, assuming equality as a given, working out from equality, trying to see how productive it can be and thus maximizing all possible liberty and equality. By contrast, anyone who starts out from distrust, who assumes inequality and proposes to reduce it, can only succeed in setting up a hierarchy of inequalities, a hierarchy of priorities, a hierarchy of intelligences – and will reproduce inequality *ad infinitum*.” (2007, 51-2)

<sup>175</sup> This isn’t to take on all the blame but to note our complicity. There were of course reasonable reasons why we did not productively bring dissensus – or if we did, why our pleas were unrecognized. Called down as “not practical”, “accusatory” (which sometimes they were), or, again, “emotional”, that gender-laced accusation.

<sup>176</sup> As Rancière points out, the making of a space of democracy requires boundary-making. By the end of the chapter, we’ll see some of the tenants do exactly that when they name a pre-condition of cooperative membership simply by asking each other “do you want to be a member of a cooperative?” This was a particular moment from which the E-PAZ struggled past being a “community of consensus” to a “community of sharing”.

<sup>177</sup> Speaking here of the social circles I was a participant in.

<sup>178</sup> I’ve borrowed the phrase “known before understood” from Britzman.

<sup>179</sup> Methodologically, because psychoanalysis proposes that the unconscious knows no time, I accept the challenge of telling stories that resist a linear telling. As Britzman puts it, “inquiry into these things called love and hate requires gigantic narrative detours, novel imaginative leaps, fantastic speculations, and so the suspension of all credible things” (2006, 61). That I insist on spending a whole chapter on one fragment might certainly be read as such a “suspension of credible things” insofar as readers might be more comfortable with a framing of this material not as a fragment but as a full account of “what happened”. The material presented is “what happened” of course, but by revolving the narrative around and leading up a joke allows me to methodologically consider facts along with feelings, the latter not understood here as “pure emotion” but in the psychoanalytic sense where strong responses can be literally physical or emotional, and become attached to animate and inanimate objects. I refer to “feelings” and “affect” throughout as a metaphorical shorthand for this understanding.

<sup>180</sup> I thank my E-PAZ friend, *A*, for pointing this out to me.

<sup>181</sup> Facilitators can, however, “step out” of their role as facilitator to express their opinion. This is okay as long as stepping out is not frequent. If a facilitator finds themselves in a situation where they “have too much to say”, best practice is to ask the role to be taken on by someone else.

<sup>182</sup> And, to be clear, it was never an apology for disagreeing with the group or individuals within it.

<sup>183</sup> Discussions outside of formal meetings – at people’s homes, on walks to or from meetings, and at social events – often involved analysis of the formation process of the Cooperative, including an analysis of gender dynamics and exclusions.

<sup>184</sup> The E-PAZ has a history of being known as an “activist hub” (the mainstay mainstream media representation) and an “anarchist” site (the CED-ally view, and that of the police.)

<sup>185</sup> Akin to the statement “I know you know I know”.

<sup>186</sup> What was also at stake during our research into guarantorship was that the credit union would only allow (or want) some cooperative members as guarantors – initially, the credit union only wanted the businesses in the building signing on as guarantors. This was an issue for the group because meeting such criteria would exclude the non-business members from being and acting as real members (able to have equal say in all decisions, including financial ones). One of the political groups – for example, an anti-police brutality organization – was unincorporated and, at this particular stage of negotiations, were considered by the credit union to be fully outside of being able to act as a guarantor. This was problematic insofar as this organization was active in the formation of and fundraising for the Cooperative as well as the day-to-day operations of the building. Credit union representatives even stated at one point that the non-businesses and non-incorporated groups could not be members of the Co-op – and, if they were, the credit union would not grant a commercial mortgage. This was potentially a huge blow to the very idea of the E-PAZ Co-op, where the like-mindedness of businesses and political / social organizations came together under the rubric of building a radical, alternative and ethical world. After much negotiation with the credit union, the “non-businesses” (the credit union’s term) and unincorporated groups were allowed to be members of the E-PAZ Co-op via a membership agreement and the non-incorporated “signing away” their (piddly) assets to the credit union. It was within this variegated confusion that we were forced to think (again) what we were trying to build and why.

<sup>187</sup> In other words, a commercial condo.

<sup>188</sup> The discussions of economic solidarity happened before the credit union accepted our argument that non-businesses could be members.

<sup>189</sup> In a way, it was a moment where we said to each other that each organization (the members of the Cooperative) needed to decide to participate in the purchase / Cooperative or not, to take on a risk or not, and to trust that other members would work together to ensure that a foreclosure situation would not be faced by the Cooperative.

<sup>190</sup> I’ve placed “supposed” in quotation marks to indicate that if co-op talk can set up an unrealistic, that is fetishized, story about cooperatives, it may equally be guilty of creating caricatures of “the mainstream” as well.

<sup>191</sup> Although the chapter discusses precise examples, I’ve used the plural here to indicate that there were other questions and other discussions as relevant as the ones I mention.

<sup>192</sup> Principles might be a guide to being but they do not themselves theorize or provide pedagogical assistance to questions of being.

<sup>193</sup> The phrase “positive thinking” doesn’t quite make me want to vomit. There isn’t quite “vomit in my mouth”. But there is potentiality. As in “somewhere near my adam’s apple I’m distinctly aware that there is the potential for vomit”. Like a desire for it. I imagine for some, the phrase does cause feelings of “wanting to vomit” and talk of “I have throw up in my mouth”. References to vomiting speak to the vernacular of my political and philosophical affiliations. Producing vomit in response to and as protest

against capitalist predominance *and* consumerism is a direct action strategy in radical circles (for an example of vomiting as direct action, see Jeppesen 2010). In a local example, an anti-police brutality organization produced a mock-newspaper whose lead story involved “reporting” on officials and others puking on each other at the (yet-to-occur-)opening of Winnipeg’s Human Rights Museum; the satire was both a critique of the white-washing of state-violence by respectable institutions and a critique of the notion of human rights. Nietzsche’s writings are also very visceral: he calls for us to listen to our gut, for instance. The phrase “I have throw up in my mouth” is one me and a couple of friends have used here and there, particularly when we are describing social(-political) situations when supposed “progressives” / “radicals” nonetheless condone or perpetuate identity-based violence in which we and others are the unwitting victims.

<sup>194</sup> In this case, the conditions of “intervention”.

<sup>195</sup> Or at least the very slight but important distinction between a project that studies the conditions of possibility versus one that attempts to find its limits.

<sup>196</sup> By “final analysis”, I mean by the end of the evaluation.

<sup>197</sup> A practice that was a “bonding” activity.

<sup>198</sup> I switch between using the pronouns “our” and “they” to indicate, in a rough sense, where I was an active participant; and when I was silent, unable to speak or, more often, unsure of what to say. This is a rough schema since, at times, some of the coordinator’s could be silent on the question of Catalyst as “band aid” too. It is impossible to account for other’s changing stances or desires. In one sense, the pronoun might well be “our” throughout. I’ve chosen to switch between them on the justification that the evaluation aimed to be focused on the coordinators.

<sup>199</sup> For point of contrast, how often in academic writing are failures taken as simple? Or, outside of work that draws on psychoanalytic precepts, how often are dreams studied as complex?

<sup>200</sup> Workfare emerged from the US and UK in the late 1980s, but it has a history of its own in Canada – specific workfare measures were instituted during Premier Mike Harris’ reign in Ontario for example (Peck 2002). As Peck and Theodore suggest, workfare conjectures that “the causes of poverty and unemployment [are formulated] ... in supply-side terms as problems of “welfare dependency”, low motivation and inadequate employability” (2000b, 120). The original form of workfare saw the invention of programs that demanded the unemployed engage in mandatory work in order to access social assistance or provisions. Workfare is usually accompanied by legislation as well as severe cutbacks as to who is eligible for social assistance.

<sup>201</sup> The one priority that is specific to demand-side intervention – Priority Area 2 (Employer HR Capacity) – has a relatively paltry budget of \$4.6 million dollars. Most of the available services and programs related to this priority include free classified ad services (job banks), research portals for information on the province’s labour market and current economic indicators, although there is one initiative that includes a wage-subsidy program (<http://www.gov.mb.ca/ctt/index.html>, accessed 21 January 2012).

<sup>202</sup> Employability also acts as euphemism for workfare, since policy makers who promote workfare do not use the term. Not unlike gentrification, workfare is a dirty word.

<sup>203</sup> Hillage and Pollard's 1988 policy paper, "Employability: Developing a framework for policy analysis", sought to define "employability" for the purpose of the Department of Education and Employment in the UK. As such, their policy paper was fundamental in shaping UK employment policy.

<sup>204</sup> See volume 42, number 2 of *Urban Studies* for critical review and engagements.

<sup>205</sup> See the work of Jamie Peck in particular.

<sup>206</sup> Although having a particular set of skills can counter-balance these demand-side "requirements".

<sup>207</sup> I witnessed all these examples during my research time at Catalyst.

<sup>208</sup> Contemporary Aboriginal employment has to be understood within a history of colonialism, which, for instance created barriers for Aboriginal people to participate in traditional economies (hunting and bartering, for example) by dispossessing them of land and resources and excluding Aboriginal peoples from settler economies. Examples of exclusions from the latter include "the placement of reserves far from urban areas; employer and co-worker racism; pass laws that limited mobility; and legal barriers to borrowing money, owning commercial enterprise, or engaging in commercial development of resources" (Mills and Clarke 2009, 994; see also Harris 2002; Carter 1997). This range of exclusionary practices were carried out by a range of institutions (not necessarily working in unison), including governments, firms and individual bosses, supervisors, or co-workers.

<sup>209</sup> "With potential" is how staff would describe trainees they advocated for.

<sup>210</sup> The coordinator's do not advocate with anyone in particular for these extensions. That is, there is no one within the organization that they seek permission to extend the trainee's program. Instead, the coordinators agree amongst themselves and haphazardly whether to keep a trainee longer than the funding period. Trainees paid out of Catalyst's social enterprise revenue are, however, listed as such on the white board that lists all of Catalyst's training program participants. How people get on the social enterprise revenue and how long they stay there was a tension that existed between the bookkeeper and the coordinators.

<sup>211</sup> Who, in turn, might be borrowing the term from internal policy papers or the mouths of their managers.

<sup>212</sup> This is especially the case for those that were successful in the drug trade. Those that managed to stay at an arms' length from the drug trade (or were somewhat protected from a necessity to be involved in the trade, say by being in child welfare) still had to find ways to survive financial and / or emotional deficits. Some found these via community organizations or (informal, non-incorporated) networks of care that exist.

<sup>213</sup> Throughout I refer to these markings as "our markings". Clearly, however, it was my hand that made the transcription.

<sup>214</sup> In the external factors column, discrimination was buried under a subheading titled "recruitment factors".

<sup>215</sup> This is my own critical reading.

<sup>216</sup> Meaning that "soft skills" were often thought to be taught by "osmosis".

<sup>217</sup> As the newest of the coordinators mentioned to me in another context (lightly mocking himself and the world), "if they [employers] don't hire them [exiting trainees],



they're racist". His comment was a mocking but serious joke that highlighted the difference between having a racial analysis of a given labour market and the fact that this in itself does not change that labour market.

<sup>218</sup> This truism was sometimes reiterated in the office in discussions among the coordinators, or, say between a coordinator and the bookkeeper or with one of the journeymen. As put by one of coordinators: "At six months we have to get these guys employed and if we're not doing this, we're not doing what we say we are doing" (observation notes, 26 October 2010).

<sup>219</sup> This despite the fact that many of the non-funded activities mapped in Figure 4 could be found on the employability table.

<sup>220</sup> As I aim to illustrate, it was also a "sudden" turn from my perspective.

<sup>221</sup> Unlike Gibson-Graham's work, whose action-oriented projects have incorporated reparative readings with the communities they work with, my reparative reading happened long after the evaluation.

<sup>222</sup> Meaning those activities Catalyst advertises on its website or annual report as front-and-center.

<sup>223</sup> A project that myself and other staff at Catalyst later developed did just this.

<sup>224</sup> Catalyst engages in a wide range of community economic development activities (social purchasing, advocacy and research, partnerships with cooperatives and social enterprises), and it also puts employees in contact with such organizations, whether to point employees to support services in the neighbourhood or introductions to gatherings – from Aboriginal sweats and feasts to an annual pancake breakfast hosted by another non-profit organization.

<sup>225</sup> When I began working at Catalyst as a manager, these were immensely productive questions. What they allowed was a critical view of the limitations and indeed the cruelties of the labour market policy that funds Catalyst's work-training program but that remained aware of the fecund practices taking place at Catalyst; practices that could be resources for program development and innovation.

<sup>226</sup> Much of what I note in this paragraph comes from my experience of talking and working with trainees once I became a manager, including one-on-one conversations and focus groups designed to generate their feedback and suggestions for the program.

<sup>227</sup> This example, while imaginative, is not far off the reality when, in 2013, Catalyst was able to arrange for their Aboriginal Level 1 carpenters to attend trade-school as a cohort. The success rate at the post-secondary level was astounding: whereas all previous single level 1 carpenters that went from Catalyst to post-secondary training failed or dropped out, 91% completed with a high seventies average, and all that completed were employed in the private sector. The group of eleven cited their "bond" and practices of sharing information (studying together, following job leads, etc.) as key to their success.

<sup>228</sup> My chapter tends to consider ethical and academic questions, but this should not limit us from considering more practical ones, such as Which of the diverse activities found in the reparative reading be expanded or formalized?

<sup>229</sup> That's what's tricky. And angry making. And frustrating. And easy to forget.

<sup>230</sup> By “findings are situated” I mean the scope of finding; in the vernacular, “the take-away”: does the “finding” draw the border between “what’s possible” and what’s not? Does it wonder about possible worlds or mark out the future as an already given?

<sup>231</sup> Although it was not the topic of the chapter, the need for tools to quantitatively evaluate an organization like Catalyst is apparent.

<sup>232</sup> This is important given the ways that responsibility for the violence of hatreds are often placed at the foot of its victims.

<sup>233</sup> Not unlike the E-PAZ in this thesis.

<sup>234</sup> By “muck”, I mean sexism and other forms of oppression, emotional abuse and the like.

<sup>235</sup> Without going into detail, “the muck” is what had kept me away from activism for so long – be it the muck of boring rhetoric about the power of capitalism or the muck of sexism. Muck skinks. My interest in the details of “the muck” stem from who I am – a person who likes to do stuff but is not bent on being a leader – and how I am. This is certainly reflected in the study itself: the research was not action-oriented, meaning that at neither site was I spearheading the projects and their focus.

<sup>236</sup> Although part of my argument was to say members of the E-PAZ tended to have an analysis of sexism but little success in doing something productive / imaginative with that analysis. As a generality, their analysis tended to assert blame and shame in perpetrators of sexism – which could have the desired effect of forcing a perpetrator of blatant sexism out of the group. Whether this is an effective strategy is questionable.

<sup>237</sup> Although precise examples of covert sexism are noted as such in the E-PAZ chapters, other examples could likewise be drawn from Catalyst – the example of the younger researcher in Chapter 3 being referred to as “inexperienced” was a gendered position, for example. Likewise, the thesis did not delve into instances of racism or classism.

<sup>238</sup> Both, to my mind are equally frustrating, equally mucky.

<sup>239</sup> Referencing here postfoundationism, traditional Marxism and leftism.

## Tables

<b>Table 1: Current and suggested market rates with percent change, E-PAZ building</b>							
Tenant	Floor	Area (sf)	Current rent (\$/sf)	Monthly	Market <sup>a</sup> (\$/sf)	Market per month	% change
Worker co-op	Basement	3,060	\$3.92	\$1,000	\$4.00	\$1,020	2%
Worker co-op <sup>b</sup>	First floor	3,060	\$5.88	\$1,499	\$8.00	\$2,040	36%
Sole-proprietor	Second	750	\$11.20	\$700	\$6.00	\$375	-46%
Non-profit org	Second	750	\$6.80	\$425	\$6.00	\$375	-12%
Sole-proprietor	Second	410	\$8.78	\$300	\$6.00	\$205	-46%
Collective	Second	240	\$5.00	\$100	\$6.00	\$120	20%
Political org	Second	240	\$6.25	\$125	\$6.00	\$120	-4%
Radical business	Second	440	\$5.45	\$200	\$6.00	\$220	10%
Political org <sup>b</sup>	Second	200	\$1.50	\$25	\$6.00	\$100	300%
Worker co-op	Second	200	\$6.00	\$100	\$6.00	\$100	0%
Cultural org <sup>b</sup>	Third	1,050	\$4.57	\$400	\$6.00	\$525	31%
Cultural org	Third	1,200	\$8.00	\$800	\$6.00	\$600	-25%
E-PAZ office	Third	120	\$0.00	\$0	\$0.00	\$0	-
Worker co-op <sup>c</sup>	Third	300	\$16.00	\$400	\$6.00	\$150	-63%
<p><i>Source:</i> Internal and consultant assessments of E-PAZ building.</p> <p><sup>a</sup> Rates based on gross potential income suggested in the building assessment.</p> <p><sup>b</sup> Indicates that the current owner of the building was directly involved in tenant organization during the building's history.</p> <p><sup>c</sup> Tenant moved into building after incorporation of E-PAZ Co-op – rental rate not determined by current owner.</p>							

<b>Table 2: Incidence of low income after tax by census tract</b>				
Census tract <sup>a</sup>	a	b	c	d
Total economic families	55.2%	50%	44.1%	46.1%
Couple economic families	37.1%	22.6%	23.8%	50%
Male lone-parent economic families	-	40%	-	50%
Female lone-parent economic families	89.5%	74.2%	77.8%	73%
Males unattached individuals (15 yrs +)	60%	38.9%	73.9%	59.6%
Female unattached individuals (15 yrs +)	86.7%	56%	52.4%	66.7%
Children under 6 years of age	84.5%	86.7%	66.7%	82.2%
Individuals 65 yrs +	71.2%	25.8%	42.9%	27.3%
<i>Source:</i> Statistics Canada 2006 <sup>a</sup> Census track numbers replaced with letters				

**Table 3: The Roberts Enterprise Development Fund's social return on investment**

The six REDF SROI measures	
Measuring value	Measuring return
Stage 1: Calculate Enterprise Value	Stage 4: Calculate Enterprise Index on Return
Stage 2: Calculate Social Purpose Value	Stage 5: Calculate Social Purpose Index on Return
Stage 3: Calculate Blended Value	Stage 6: Calculate Blended Index on Return
<i>Source:</i> Flockhart 2005, 34	

<b>Table 4: Cooperative principles</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Voluntary and open membership</li> <li>2. Democratic member control</li> <li>3. Member economic participation</li> <li>4. Autonomy and independence</li> <li>5. Education, training and information</li> <li>6. Co-operation among co-operatives</li> <li>7. Concern for community</li> </ol>
<i>Source:</i> International Co-operative Alliance ( <a href="http://ica.coop/en">ica.coop/en</a> )

<b>Table 5: Overview of 2010 / 11 LMA priority areas, goals and estimate expenditures</b>		
Priority area	Stated goal	Estimated expenditures
1. Skills development	Manitobans have the skills required to be successful in the labour market	LMA \$13.9 million STTF \$1.6 million*
2. Employer HR capacity	Manitoba employers have the capacity to effectively manage and develop their human resources	LMA \$4.6 million STTF \$750 thousand
3. Community capacity	Manitoba communities are able to support and benefit from labour market growth	LMA \$2.3 million
4. Labour supply	Manitoba has an adequate supply of labour to support economic growth	LMA \$1.2 million STTF \$600 thousand
5. Skills utilization	Manitoba labour force participants are fully utilizing their skills	LMA \$1.6 million
6. Training system**	Manitoba's training system is meeting labour market needs	STTF \$2.6 million
7. Labour market efficiency**	Manitoba's labour market is operating efficiently	STTF \$200 thousand
<p>* STTF, or Strategic Training and Transition Fund, is a two-year program providing additional funds by the federal government to the LMA in response to the global economic downturn.</p> <p>** STTF-specific priorities.</p> <p><i>Source: Canada—Manitoba Labour Market Agreement, 2010/11 Annual Plan</i></p>		

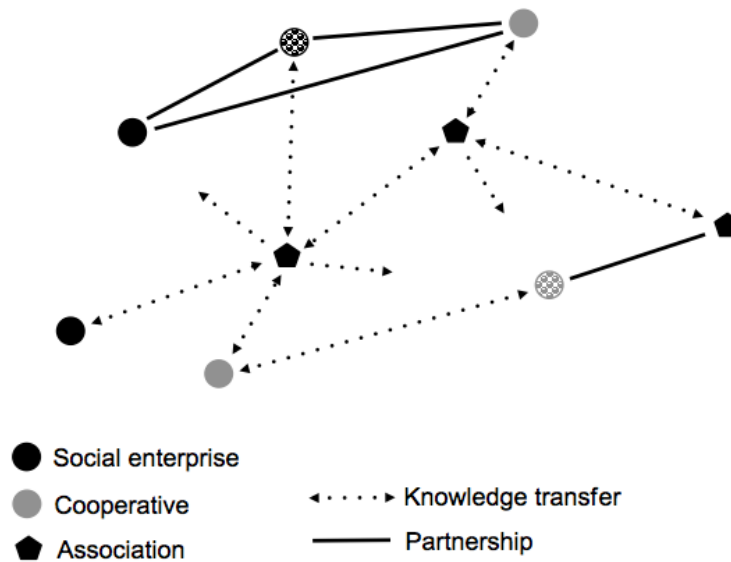
**Table 6: Summary of McQuaid and Lindsay's employability framework (2005)**

An employability framework		
Individual factors	Personal circumstances	External factors
Employability skills and attributes Essential attributes Personal competencies Basic transferable skills Key transferable skills High level transferable skills Qualifications Work knowledge base Labour market attachment	Household circumstances Direct caring responsibilities Other family and caring responsibilities Other household circumstances	Demand factors Labour market factors Macroeconomic factors Vacancy characteristics Recruitment factors
Demographic characteristics	Work culture	Enabling support factors Employment policy factors Other enabling policy factors
Health and well-being Health Disability	Access to resources Access to transport Access to financial capital Access to social capital	
Job seeking		
Adaptability and mobility		



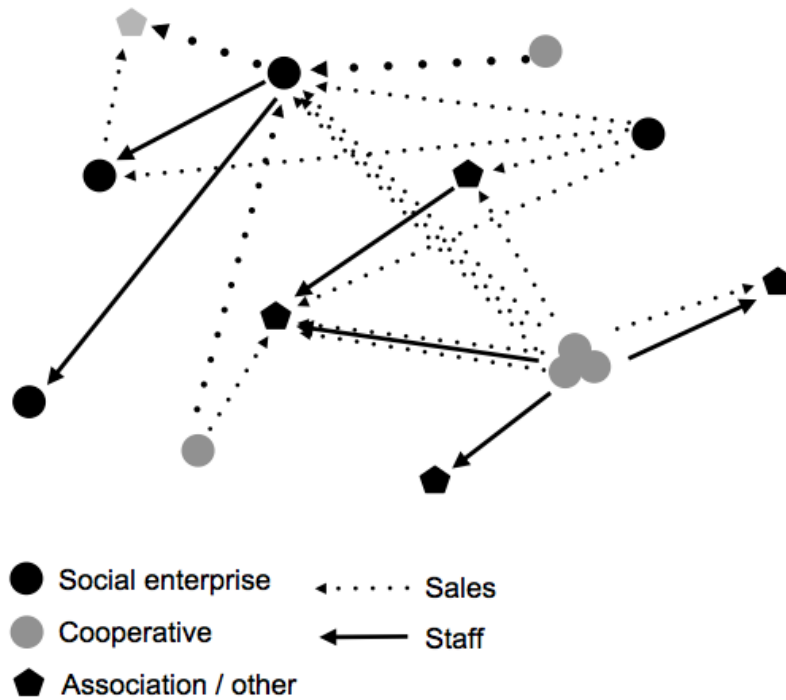
## Figures

Figure 1: Partnerships and knowledge transfers



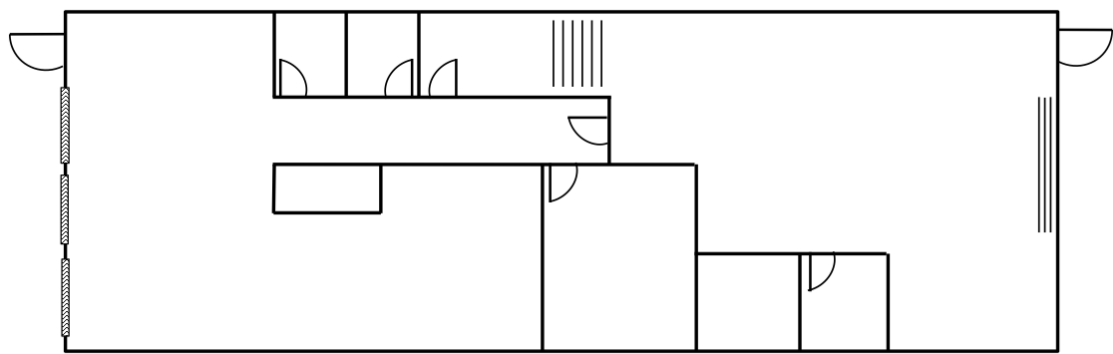
The dotted circles represent Catalyst (black polka-dots) and the E-PAZ Cooperative (grey polka-dots). Arrows show direct and partial knowledge transfers.

**Figure 2: A network of sales and staff**

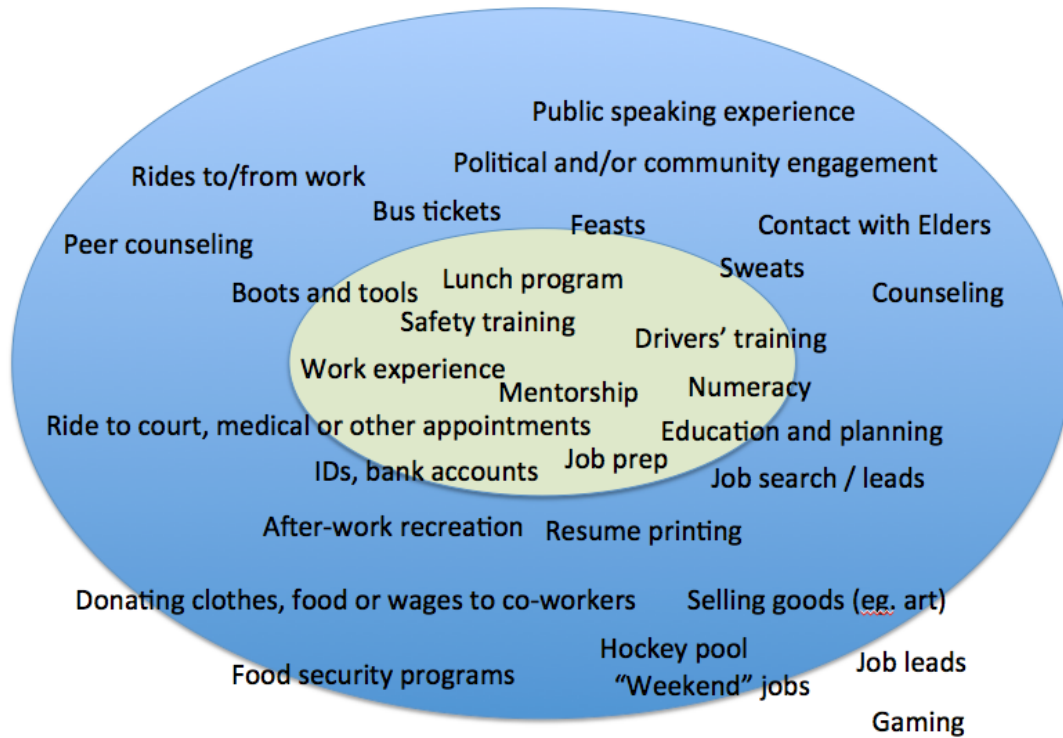


The E-PAZ in this representation is presented as three overlapping dots, highlighting the fact that the Cooperative is itself made up independent organizations (non-incorporated associations and worker cooperatives). The grey pentagon is a public-owned social housing enterprise.

**Figure 3: Catalyst’s office and workshop**



**Figure 4: A reparative mapping of labour market interventions**



Key: Activities in the inner circle refer to government funded and approved activities, the inner blue area includes activities that Catalyst does and often publically acknowledges and celebrates. At the outer area are activities that take place and happen on the margins (job leads, gaming) or occur through contact with other organizations (eg. food security programs).

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Figure 6: Ambiguous markings

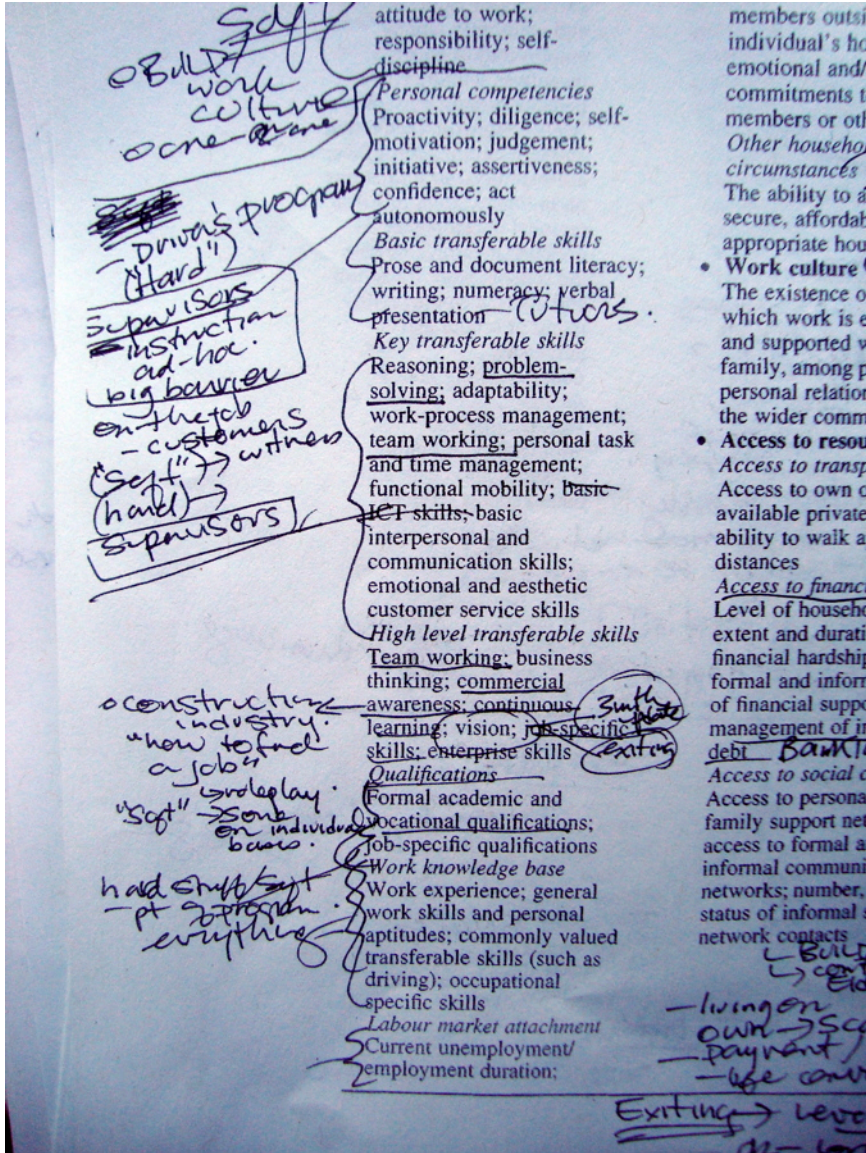


Figure 7: Promoting labour

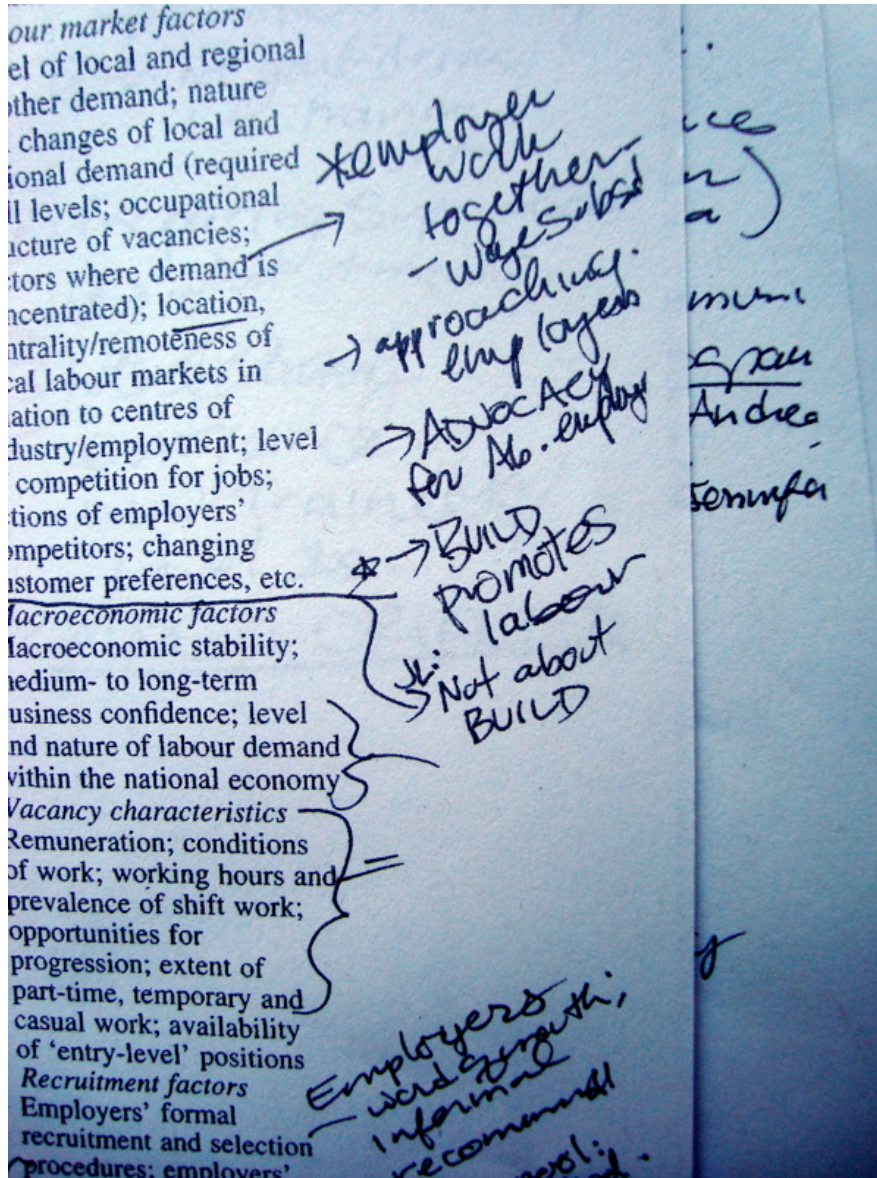
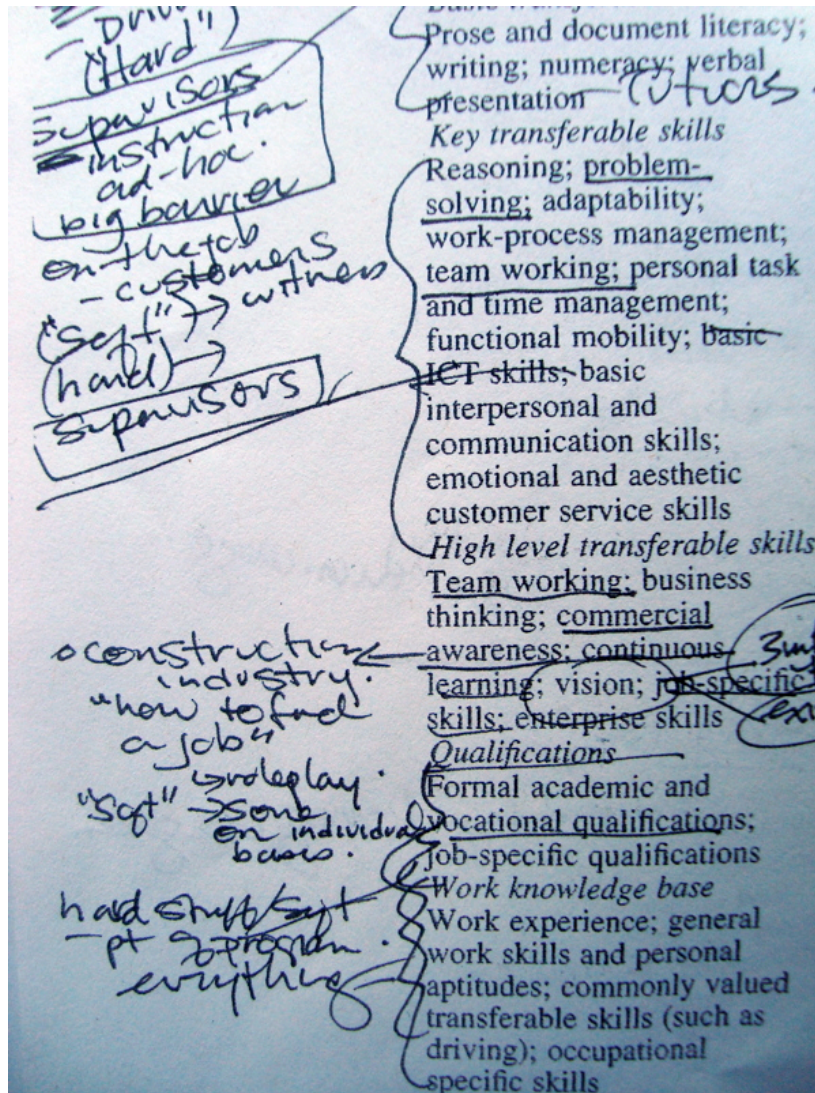




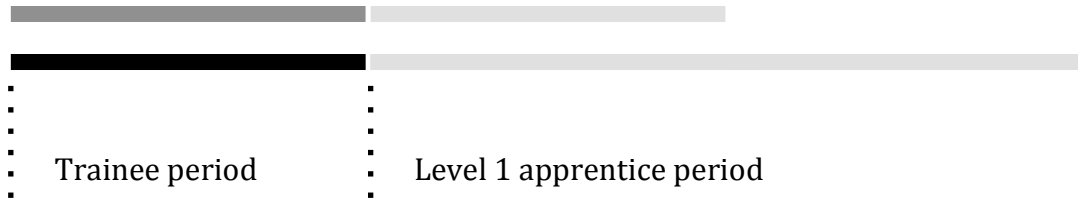
Figure 8: The point of the program





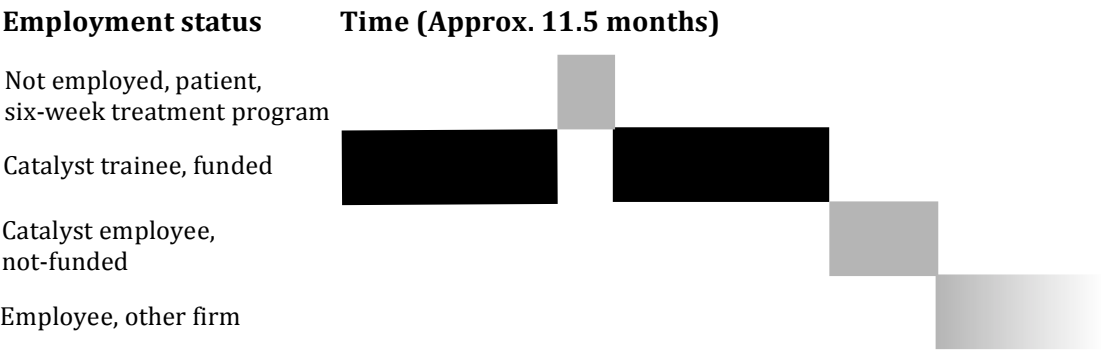
### Figure 9: Funder time

Funder time is limited: each block line represents six months, and the two shades represent two separate funders. The grey line is funding for Aboriginal people specifically, and the black line is for people of any ethnic background. Aboriginal workers first funded by the provincial funder can be funded through the federal program for an additional 12 months; whereas any person on the federal funding dollar who is hired as an apprentice can only be funded up to an additional 6 months longer. This means that the training overall invested in differently funded employees can vary greatly. It should be noted that the number of positions for Level 1 Apprentices is limited to around 10 spots, whereas the training dollars can fund around 20 participants each.



**Figure 10: Funder and non-funder time**

Figure shows an example of a theoretical-particular Trainee or Apprentice and their employment at Catalyst, where only some time is their job paid for through government-funded “training dollars”.



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