

# BEYOND ECONOMY, SOCIETY, AND ENVIRONMENT

TOWARD A POLITICS  
OF ECOLOGICAL LIVELIHOOD  
IN MAINE, USA

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Culture and Society, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in Political and Social Thought

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*For Uncle Charles*



## Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



signed by the candidate, Ethan Miller  
on this 24th day of September 2015.



# Thesis Abstract

## Beyond Economy, Society, and Environment: Toward a Politics of Ecological Livelihoods in Maine, USA

By ETHAN MILLER

Struggles over just and sustainable futures are commonly posed as conflicted encounters between the domains of *economy*, *society*, and *environment*. Whether one must choose between inevitable trade-offs, seek balances, or enact harmonizations, this triple schema stands as a pervasive articulation in contemporary thought and political practice. Yet such terms of engagement, this thesis argues, are not inevitable. The trio of economy, society, and environment is a contingent, historically-produced configuration that, while powerful, continually fails to fully organize the world it purports to describe. Accepting it as *given* risks stifling crucial possibilities for composing worlds and lives otherwise. How might the enclosures of this trio and its accompanying forms of discipline and subjectivation be challenged and unraveled? What other ways of thinking might help to articulate new ethical modes of collective life on an increasingly volatile earth? Situating these questions in the context of contemporary struggles over “development” in the state of Maine (USA), this thesis enacts a simultaneously critical, deconstructive, and generative engagement between theory and fieldwork. Forty in-depth interviews with Maine policy professionals working in economic development, social service, and environmental advocacy, plus close readings of publications associated with their work, are placed in mutually-transformative conversation with key threads of poststructuralist, postdevelopment, and posthumanist political theory. This

encounter is re-worked in three iterative stages, inspired by the “pragmatics” of Deleuze and Guattari. First, a critical *tracing* identifies ways in which common mobilizations of the three categories often serve to reproduce capitalist hegemony, nature-culture divisions, and the marginalization of more-than-human living beings and processes. Second, the work of *decomposition* amplifies the multiplicity of the categories and the many ways in which thought, action, and desire continually escape them. Maine's policy professionals variously resist, evade, or overflow the very hegemonic articulations they are also captured by, enacting lines of flight toward other possibilities. Finally, *(re)composition* aims to strengthen and consolidate emergent yearnings beyond the trio by elaborating a series of concepts around the language of “ecological livelihoods,” aimed toward rendering more visible the multiple forms of interrelation and interdependence that compose our common (and uncommon) worlds, and toward opening up new, experimental terrains for ethico-political articulation, alliance, and transformation.



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# Introduction

The point is to get at how worlds are made and unmade, in order to participate in the process, in order to foster some forms of life and not others. (Haraway 1994, 62)

This thesis originated with what might seem like a straightforward problem of definition: What are we saying and doing when we speak of an “economy,” a “society,” and an “environment” as three core spheres of contemporary life? What do we mean when referring to something as having an “economic,” a “social,” and an “environmental” dimension? One could, of course, seek to answer such questions by making a set of clarifying distinctions: “Let us define these terms more precisely ...” A coalition of policy and advocacy organizations in Maine, for example, proposed in a 1996 report that “sustainability is three-dimensional.” They defined the “environmental perspective” in terms of operational respect for the limits of ecological “carrying capacity,” the “social dimension” as the domain of human community, institutions, and culture, and the “economic perspective” as a focus on income, employment, and technological change (Sustainable Maine 1996, 11–13). Yet the questions remain: What does it mean to make these distinctions in the first place? What are the *ethical and political effects* of a division between an “economy,” a “society,” and an “environment”? What kinds of relations, affects, investments, and forms of life do such distinctions generate and sustain? What possibilities for thinking and acting otherwise might they work to foreclose?

My own concerns about this trio crystallized in a workshop at the 2009 U.S. Solidarity Economy Forum (Amherst, Massachusetts) where I was presenting an overview of concepts and practices related to emerging solidarity economy (SE) movements. I had been uncomfortable with the narrow implications of the term “economy” in the phrase “solidarity economy,” since the SE organizing efforts are clearly oriented well beyond economistic framings, seeking to construct wider articulations of human and more-than-human flourishing (see, for example, Arruda 2008; 2009; Mance 2010; Miller 2005). I showed, therefore, a slide depicting a simple triangle. At each point was written, respectively, “economic solidarity,” “social solidarity,” and “ecological solidarity,” their linked co-presence indicating that one must keep all three in play while building transformative movements. As I described this framework to my audience, I could hear another voice speaking inside me: “What are you saying? What, really, are the differences between these three points? Isn't this just a problematic patch-job trying to cover over the fact that the very *distinctions themselves* must be taken as a problem?” While I may have reminded my fellow activists that a solidarity *economy* was not alone sufficient, I also participated in reproducing a division that I could not defend. In what sense are the economic and the social not always already ecological or “environmental”? In what sense can an “economy” be isolated—even for strategic or analytical purposes—from a domain of sociality? In what sense can a “social” or an “economic” be unproblematically distinguished from the “environmental”? Don't these distinctions—regardless of the precision of their definitions—in fact reproduce an ethico-political habitat in which capitalist economism, human exceptionalism, and multiple forms of colonial domination can continue to thrive?



Indeed, I had been following emerging trends in philosophy, political theory, science studies, and critical geography that were calling each of these terms—and the broader onto-political configurations upon which they are founded—into question. From Bruno Latour's (2005) critique of the “social” and J. K. Gibson-Graham's deconstruction of “the economy” (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003; Gibson-Graham 1995; 2006) to the multiple challenges mounted against concepts of “nature” and “environment” (e.g., Smith 1990; Soper 1995; Braun and Castree 1998; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Castree and Braun 2001; Braun 2002; Latour 2004), none of these categories appeared to hold up well as apolitical descriptions in the face of critical, genealogical, and deconstructive analysis.<sup>1</sup> Economy, society, and environment appeared not as inevitable categories in need of definitional clarity, but rather as contingent, historically-produced articulations loaded with problematic ethical and political implications. Why, then, did I continue to rely on them so heavily? Why were alternatives to this triple framework so difficult to imagine—much less render practical—in the context of crafting ideas to support transformative movements?

The urgency of such questions has been further reinforced by my involvement in various efforts to curtail or re-direct ecologically-destructive industrial development projects in the state of Maine, my long-time home and the fieldwork site for this thesis. Over and over again, struggles to imagine and enact more equitable and sustainable futures confront conundrums structured by the triple distinction: economy (jobs) versus environment; social cohesion and cultural tradition versus economic development; “local communities” versus environmentalists. Individuals and organizations in Maine are all-too-often either

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1 Other key sources for these insights will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

forced into polarized and oppositional “camps” or constrained within frameworks of “compromise” and “consensus” that remain beholden to status quo modes of thought and organization. Those fighting to protect the habitat of endangered Canada lynx, for example, are easily rendered as foes of the humans trying to “make a living” in the heavily-forested northern regions of the state, and those who seek to construct viable and stable sources of income for rural Maine people frequently find themselves choosing between (and advocating for) a narrow array of ecologically-destructive development options whose terms have been pre-framed by the wider landscape of ethico-political imagination and institution. A vast array of potential alliances, transformative becomings, and pathways for enacting life otherwise are foreclosed in the narrow space that the trio of economy, society, and environment (among other elements) has constituted.

Such a concern can only be raised, of course, if one refuses to accept these categories as simply *given*. To a widely-circulating common sense, such a refusal might seem absurd. What do economists *do* if not identify (and perhaps then more effectively intervene in) the specific mechanics of an economy that they encounter “out there” in the world? How can sociologists study “society” if it isn't already present for them to engage with? The environment, surely, is the very *opposite* of a “social construction,” confronting humans with multiple demands and limits that clearly exist independently of any discourse about them. Yet these are precisely the kinds of assumptions that multiple threads of poststructuralist theory have called into question. In various ways, writers such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Judith Butler, and Donna Haraway (among many others) have argued that the categories with which we organize the world are not simply neutral descriptions of objective realities awaiting elucidation, but rather are *technologies of world-making*,

“performative” articulations (e.g., Butler 1993) that participate in the composition of that which they purport only to describe. While one can clearly say that human beings have always participated in processes of production and transaction, an “economy” only emerges via a historically-specific configuration of discursive practices and constructed material relations. Sociality may be present in multiple forms across human and more-than-human communities, but it takes a specific set of contingent, material-semiotic interventions to produce a distinct domain that can be marked off as “society” or “the social.” And though all living beings can be said to subsist within a web of ecological relations, these only become an “environment” when *made so* by particular practices of representation and material construction. Economy, society, and environment are neither inevitable realities nor neutral descriptions. As I will elaborate further in chapter 1, there is a “politics” at play not only in their definitions and the question of their relations, but in their very *production* as operative, world-changing distinctions.

This thesis begins from the intuition that our very ability to distinguish between something called “economy”, “society”, and “environment” is a problematic *symptom* of a mode of collective organization and thought that must be radically transformed. Whether due to the ways that this distinction isolates certain relations of sustenance (“the economy”) into a reified domain of depoliticized, asocial, and anti-ecological inevitability (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003; Gibson-Graham 2006; Swanson 2008; Gibson-Graham and Miller 2015), or to the ways in which it reproduces a division between a “human” sociality and a (nonhuman) “environment” (Plumwood 1993; Morton 2007; Foss 2009; Lakoff 2010; Colebrook 2014), this trio functions to reinforce multiple ethical and political patterns that undermine possibilities for human and more-than-human flourishing. As Val

Plumwood writes: “If our species does not survive the ecological crisis, it will probably be due to our failure...to work out new ways to live with the earth, to rework ourselves. We will go onwards in a different mode of humanity, or not at all” (2007, 1). The generative exploration of this “different mode” must involve a critical, deconstructive, and creative engagement with the trio of economy, society, and environment and the complex interrelations that these categories attempt (and continually fail) to capture. This is the project to which this thesis is dedicated.

The pages that follow are primarily an exercise in political theory, putting key threads of poststructuralist, postdevelopment, and posthumanist scholarship into conversation in service of my research focus. Yet this thesis is also intended as a practice of situated, action-oriented engagement. My home is in the place now known as the state of Maine, in the northeasternmost corner of the United States, and it is in this place that I have rooted both my activist and scholarly engagement.<sup>2</sup> I view theory as a tool for challenging fixed modes of thought, opening up new possibilities, and enabling transformative action, and therefore I seek to continually shuttle back-and-forth between spaces of theorization and sites of active, on-the-ground experimentation. While my research practice was limited in this project to textual analysis and interviews (a more robust action research project was beyond the scope of available time and resources), I have aimed to continually root my work in my place and in the struggles I am committed to for the long-haul. This thesis is, therefore, a practice of what I have found myself calling “philosophy with fieldwork,” the deliberate production of a space in which the lines between theoretical texts and conversations with policy and advocacy practitioners blurs or

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<sup>2</sup> I say “now known as” to recognize the history of colonization that has constructed the “State of Maine.” The land now known as Maine has been, and continues to be, inhabited by the Wabanaki (Abenaki, Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot) people, and was forcibly taken and transformed into what is now called “Maine.”

breaks down. I am interested, first and foremost, in the kinds of ethico-political strategies that theoretical engagement with and beyond the trio of economy, society, and environment might enable in Maine and, perhaps, elsewhere.

The core fieldwork animating my questions, further described in chapter 2, is a series of forty in-depth interviews with Maine policy professionals working in economic development, social service, and environmental advocacy, plus close readings of publications associated with their work. I took the challenge of my animating questions quite literally, seeking out people (within organizations) for whom the categories of the trio might constitute key foundations of daily thought and practice. Who might be most deeply invested in the ongoing production and stabilization of “economy,” of “society” (or, in many cases, its alternative form, “community”), and “environment”? How do they articulate and practice the politics of these categories? Even more importantly for my project, how do they sometimes *fail* to uphold the distinctions and to reproduce their hegemonic contours? How might these professionals even be found to actively *resist* these categories and enact other modes of thinking and world-making that beckon beyond them? It is from a sustained engagement with these questions that I can then add my own experimental interventions to the mix: how might ideas and approaches from poststructuralist, postdevelopment, and posthumanist theory help to identify hegemonic complicities, failures of hegemony, and “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) toward other possibilities? Furthermore, how might new conceptual approaches help to consolidate and strengthen some of these lines of flight in the direction of new ethico-political languages and strategies?

I approach my fieldwork with the assumption that my interviewees do not speak as simple, unified subjects. If, at one moment, they affirm the hegemony of a

problematic divide between economy, society, and environment, they may, at another moment, destabilize this articulation and suggest radically different ways of framing ethical and political negotiations in Maine. This is not a matter of teasing out inconsistencies or contradictions in the name of a discursive clarification (e.g., “What is *really* going on here is...”). Rather, I view these interviews as sites of *multiplicity*, spaces in which myriad conflicting and co-mingling desires, understandings, and possibilities circulate and emerge. These complex encounters can be performatively “read” in many ways—including ways that might subvert the intentions or institutional commitments of those I have interviewed. My method enacts, in a broad sense, what Donna Haraway (1992, 300) calls “diffraction,” and what Deleuze and Guattari call “schizoanalysis” (1983) or “pragmatics” (1987): the performative multiplication of differences and their effects in order to open up new possibilities for intervention and transformation.

This multiplication is quite similar to the strategy that J.K. Gibson-Graham refers to as “reading for difference rather than dominance” (2006, xxxii), but with an important variation. My goal is to enact a series of readings that *refuses* an either/or framing that would pit the crucial work of critique (reading for dominance) against the equally-crucial work of rendering new possibilities visible (reading for difference). As I will argue further in chapter 2, one cannot viably seek to imagine and construct “alternatives” without also engaging the multiple ways in which articulations of economy, society, and environment are bound up in—and powerfully reproductive of—relations of alienation, capitalist exploitation, and colonialism (to name a few key dynamics). To avoid critique is to risk becoming vulnerable to inadvertent re-capture by the very forces and processes one seeks to escape. Yet to *dwell* in critique is to risk reinforcing, via performative affirmation,

the power of these problematic relations. We must learn to do *both*: critique while also escaping the performative grip that such critique risks entrapping us within. For the project at hand, I have found a powerful set of tools to enable such work in Deleuze and Guattari's iterative process of "pragmatics," as outlined in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, 145–148). Here, in simple terms, one begins with a critical *tracing* of the ways in which a particular assemblage is expressive of a hegemonic regime of power; then one proceeds to *decompose* this representation into a complex cloud of multiple and conflictual "becomings"; and, finally, one experiments with provisional *(re)compositions* that might enable new assemblages to emerge.

Following the introductory Part I, in which I further elaborate on the problem of the economy, society, and environment trio (chapter 1) and my methods for approaching this problem in Maine (chapter 2), the thesis is structured by these three "movements" of Deleuzoguattarian pragmatics. The two chapters of Part II enact a critical *tracing*, identifying ways in which common mobilizations of the three categories often serve to reproduce capitalist hegemony, nature-culture divisions, and the marginalization of more-than-human living beings and processes. In chapter 3, this critical analysis involves an examination of the three categories—as constituted via interviews and Maine policy literature—as "domains" captured by and subjected to an articulation of the economy as a "force" beyond human agency. Chapter 4 extends this analysis, first unpacking multiple ways in which this configuration relies on the ongoing production of externalities—excluded elements upon which each category of the trio nonetheless relies—and then linking the three categories to a wider, modern "diagram of power" (Deleuze 1988) in which binaries of Nature/Culture and Capital/ State, pushed ever-forward by a linear line of Development, structure the space of ethico-political possibility.

The work of *decomposition* unfolds in Part III, reading interviews and policy literature in ways that amplify the multiplicity of the three categories and highlight the many ways in which thought, action, and desire continually escape them. Here, Maine's policy professionals can be seen to variously resist, evade, or overflow the very hegemonic articulations they are also captured by, enacting lines of flight toward other possibilities. Chapter 5 initiates this decomposition by identifying key moments and sites of hesitation, uncertainty, and discomfort relative to the trio's presence in interview encounters. Chapter 6 pushes this destabilization further, multiplying and fracturing interviewee's definitions of the categories beyond recognition and generating a “fog bank” of blurred complexity.

This fog bank, which I re-frame as a space of radical possibility via Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a “body without organs” (1987, 153), constitutes a starting-point for the the final part of the thesis (Part IV). Here, through the necessarily-speculative work of *(re)composition*, I aim to strengthen and consolidate emergent yearnings beyond the trio by elaborating a series of experimental concepts that both draw on and transform articulations by interviewees in Maine. Chapter 7 attempts to constitute an affective and conceptual space for thinking beyond economy, society, and environment through the theorization of “ecopoiesis,” derived from the Greek *oikos* (habitat, home) and *poiesis* (creation). This refers to the multi-faceted, indeterminate, and ongoing material-semiotic co-composition of *habitats* and their *inhabitants*, and functions as a conceptual tool for shifting the focus from the *product* of composition (e.g., economy, society, environment) to the continual, open *process* by which current—and, most importantly, future, *other*— assemblages are (and might be) made. When freed from necessary capture by the hegemonic trio, key dynamics of ecopoiesis can be re-framed and amplified through



elaboration and extension of J.K. Gibson-Graham's (2006) concept of “ethical negotiation,” and glimmers of an alternative language for expressing this negotiation can be found in the discourse of “quality of life” circulating among some Maine policy professionals.

Seeking to build on the nascent, radical possibilities of this discourse, Chapter 8 constructs a language of “ecological livelihoods,” drawing from elements of interviews and engaging critically and constructively with other scholarly articulations of “livelihood,” from Karl Polanyi's substantive economics (Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson 1957; Polanyi 1977; 1992) to the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) in development theory (e.g., Chambers and Conway 1991; Scoones 1998; 2009; Ashley and Carney 1999; Carney 2003). I argue for a notion of ecological livelihood that includes humans and nonhumans alike, refuses *a priori* determinations of causal dynamics (such as economic “laws”), acknowledges the incommensurability of livelihood values, and re-conceives “development” not as a progressive trajectory but as a ruptural *event* that might open possibilities for enacting livelihoods (especially those of the so-called “developers”) differently.

In chapter 9, I attempt to flesh out this notion with a series of conceptual “tools” for thinking more precisely about a *politics* of ecological livelihood. I sketch out a framework for rendering visible three core dimensions of ecological livelihood—making a living, making livings for others, and being-made by others—and I propose a concept of “commoning” and “uncommoning” to conceptualize dynamics of ethical exposure and “anesthetization” (Stengers 2005) in livelihood negotiations. Finally, in another re-reading of my interviews, I identify ten “ethical coordinates of livelihood negotiation” at play in Maine. These are processes of struggle that cut across and through the hegemonic trio of economy, society, and environment, and

their increased visibility might help to render more tangible the multiple forms of interrelation and interdependence that compose our common (and uncommon) worlds, and open up new, experimental terrains for ethico-political articulation, alliance, and transformation.

The thesis concludes with a semi-fictional story of a family in rural Maine, illustrating the multiple dynamics of the three movements of tracing, decomposition, and (re)composition and seeking to render more palpable the stakes and possibilities present in making these movement “real,” on-the-ground, in future action research and organizing intervention.

This, then, in summary, is the problem that I am ultimately seeking to both constitute and engage in this thesis: How might we think beyond a conventional division of the world into an economy, a society, and an environment? What kinds of orienting concepts and approaches might help us to follow the most liberatory “lines of flight” emanating from the crisis of contemporary categories and contribute toward the strengthening and connection of multiple forms of experimentation and engagement already underway beyond the old trio? What might such a language look like when developed in dynamic conversation between particularly fruitful threads of social theory and a committed engagement to a specific place on earth? This is, admittedly, an ambitious task, and I can only stumble toward some tentative possibilities in these pages. I view this thesis as an experiment, and like all experiments its achievements may lie more in its failures than in its successes. I see my work here as one small part of a much larger conversation in which I hope to be a helpful participant. My gratitude goes out to all whom I have learned from and with whom I share this conversation.

## A Note to Interviewee Readers

Should anyone I have interviewed for this project venture into the relative academic obscurity of this thesis, please remember this as you read: This is not a typical research report, documenting the singular “truth” of what you have said to me, nor is it a literary exercise that simply takes liberty with your words. I have approached our conversations as complex convergences of multiple, and sometimes contradictory, perspectives. At times you may find yourself “speaking” a perspective that you, in fact, disagree with; at other times you may find yourself aligned with a position that you have never fully considered. And yet I do not intend to distort your words or thoughts. I recognize, instead, that words are never spoken by an individual alone. As I describe further in chapter 2, each of us speak as participants in worlds of meaning that exceed us, and the things we say have effects well beyond our conscious intentions. This is one reason why “theory” is useful: it can help us to tease out the complexities of our ideas and statements, and to become more aware of the webs of power and meaning out of which they emerge and which they might sustain or challenge.

We never really *are*, in fact, the “individuals” that a certain dominant story about reality would have us believe. None of us are unified, perfectly-aligned “wholes,” expressing single, definitive realities in our speech and action. We are full of voices, perspectives, and yearnings that pull in different directions. As Walt Whitman wrote:

Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then ... I contradict myself;  
I am large ... I contain multitudes. (2007, 67)

We exist at the intersection of many forces, and we negotiate with these forces daily to construct provisional solutions to impossibly complex problems. Some of what we each say, think, and do is inevitably an expression of dominant and problematic aspects of the status quo (and I say “we” here because I, too, am complicit in this). And yet some of what we say, think, and do is much more complicated and interesting—it continually *escapes* dominant ways of speaking and acting. We find ourselves (or might be found by others) moving beyond conventional categories, challenging habits of thinking, transgressing boundaries. We are all a “mess.” We don't conform perfectly to what we are “told” to be and to do, and amidst this mess emerge threads of longing, aspiration, and creativity that (might) carry us toward other—hopefully better—ways of being and becoming.

What you will find in the pages that follow—or, at least, this is my hope—are a series of very different “views” of reality that highlight different dimensions of thought and action (yours and others). If you find yourself (anonymously) presented as complicit with a problematic hegemony in one chapter, you may find yourself articulating a powerful statement against it in another. If this seems strange and unsettling, I suppose that this is the very point of it all: to unsettle so that space can be opened for new possibilities to emerge. I can only ask for your patience and for your openness to this adventure of thought. And I can only hope that this thesis might offer something interesting, provocative, and useful back to you in return for the generosity of time and thought that you have shared with me. At the very least, may this be an opening to new conversations between and among us, yet-to-come.

# Part I

## Problems & Methods



# Chapter 1

## The Problem of the Trio

... they are at the heart of the Western world: bubbles which protect us and spheres in which we live tranquilly, shielded from the rest of the world. (Callon 2007, 148)

It is no longer possible to believe in the a priori existence of regimes, systems or spheres. (Çaliskan and Callon 2009, 387)

### Economy, Society, and Environment: A Constitutional Geometry

In 2006, GrowSmart Maine commissioned The Brookings Institution to write a strategic report outlining Maine's prospects in the face of wider national and global transformations. *Charting Maine's Future* urges the state's policy makers to recognize that Maine stands at a “critical juncture” amidst a rapidly-changing world, positioned “within reach of a new prosperity—*if* [the state] takes bold action and focuses its limited resources on a few critical investments” (2006, 6). With a dramatic tone oscillating between threatening scarcity and Promethean abundance, the report makes clear that such prosperity must be “sustainable,” balancing economic needs with social and environmental concerns: “Economic growth is more and more seen as essential to support environmental and community health, but so are the latter goods recognized as essential to securing the former. ... This holistic insight, moreover, is widely shared by Maine people” (2006, 15).

*Charting Maine's Future* may have done for Maine's policy landscape what the famous “Brundtland Report” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) did at the level of international policy discourse. Sustainability

is now a widespread aspiration in Maine and a generalized, if vague, agreement can be found across the literature produced by the state's policy professionals that development must proceed in ways that balance economic, social, and environmental dimensions.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the opening pages of the Maine Economic Growth Council's annual statistical survey, *Maine Measures of Growth in Focus*, is adorned with a now-familiar image (figure 1): three core domains of contemporary life arranged as a Venn diagram and converging to constitute the vaguely-normative space called “quality of life” (Maine Development Foundation 2013). Effective development policy in Maine, this report's framing suggests, would

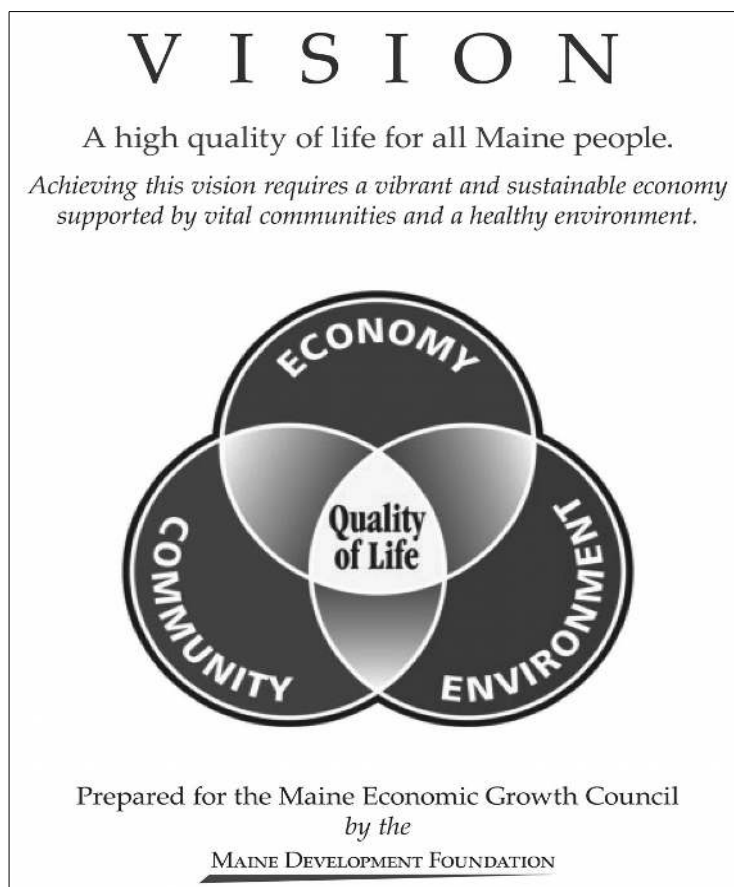


Figure 1. The opening page of *Maine Measures of Growth in Focus* (Maine Development Foundation 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Strategies regarding how to precisely *define* or *operationalize* this notion are not shared. I am pointing here only to the common *discursive space* within which debates play out.



involve making measurable improvements in all three domains with the hope of achieving their optimal combined outcome “for all Maine people.”

We are presented here with a pervasive structure of thought. Whether figured as a trio of overlapping circles or otherwise, contemporary public discourses, institutions, policies, and political struggles are significantly oriented by the three domains of the *economic*, the *social* (in the form of “society” or “community”), and the *environmental*. Each individual term, whether used as an adjective or a noun, constitutes a seemingly-stable point of reference or categorization. When reporter Matthew Stone asks, “Is Maine’s economy recovering?” (2013), he can presume that his object of inquiry is already constituted as a real entity or field which itself needs no definition. When research biologist Fred Kircheis proposes in an editorial that “rules to protect Maine’s environment are insufficient” (2014), this environment can be taken as a non-controversial object around which various political conflicts might circulate. When Maine Governor Paul LePage says that illegal drugs are “tearing at the social fabric of our communities” (Hoey 2014), the force of his rhetoric can rely on a notion of a “social” that functions as a kind of relational glue in the background of daily life in Maine. When the legislatively-mandated Sustainable Maine Coalition proposes that “sustainability is three dimensional,” no further explanation of these dimensions is needed: *economic* sustainability assures the viability of “economic” activity, *environmental* sustainability engages key dimensions of “the environment,” and *social* sustainability addresses “social relationships” in various ways (Sustainable Maine 1996, 11). “Everyone” knows what economy, society, and environment mean, or at least these signifiers appear as so foundational that the *question* of their meaning rarely arises in public discourse.

A whole array of practices and institutions are built around the apparent stability and objectivity of these domains. The economic, the social, and the environmental are the targets of various widely-disseminated forms of measurement and quantitative representation that help to give them their shape and “obviousness”: the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Maine Economy at a Glance* (2014), the *State of Maine's Environment Report* issued by the Colby College Environmental Policy Group (2010), and the Maine implementation of Harvard University's *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey* (Maine Community Foundation 2006) are but three examples. Each domain, furthermore, is *instituted* in various ways by the state's public, semi-public and private organisational infrastructure: the Maine Economic Growth Council, the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Environment Maine, the Maine Community Foundation, and the Social Services Divisions in Maine cities such as Portland, Lewiston and Auburn, among others. Each of these entities appears to variously engage with, manage, protect, develop, support, and struggle over sets of issues, objects, and relationships which are assumed to be of an economic, social, and environmental nature.

These distinctions have a significant place in the landscape of Maine's political imagination and in the history of the state's political struggles. Maine is one of many places in which something called “the economy” has often appeared to be in conflict with something called “the environment,” and in a perhaps more ambiguous relationship with something called “community” or “society.” Multiple complex struggles over the past fifty years in Maine have been captured and distilled into the classic formulation of “economy versus environment”: the heated “payroll versus pickerel” debates surrounding Maine senator Edmund Muskie's 1972

Clean Water Act (Colgan 2006); the forest clearcutting regulation struggles of the late 1990s (Gerritt 1997; Hagan III 1996); and more recent conflicts over private resort development along the largely-wild Moosehead Lake (Bell 2007; Bley 2007) and a proposed private east-west highway through the center of the state (Philbrook 2012). At the same time, “community” or “community vitality” (Maine Downtown Coalition 2014) in Maine appears to be at once threatened by and in desperate need of a robust “economy” (Palmer et al. 2009, 2). In a common framing, an ever-aging and flat or declining population (Sherwood and Mageean 2004), rising unemployment, and multiple economic changes threaten to undermine long-standing rural communities and traditions (Barringer 2004) and unravel the “social fabric” of the state. The economy both causes this unraveling and offers its only possible solution.

Resolutions to these kinds of conflicts are often sought and framed via the three terms, as in the “three legged stool of sustainable development” (Barringer 2004, xxx). From the attempt in *Charting Maine's Future* to link economy, community, and environment via “quality of place” and “sustainable prosperity” (The Brookings Institution 2006) to Environment Maine's *Trail Map to Prosperity*, advocating for “livable communities” and a “green economy” (Maine Conservation Voters Education Fund and Environmental Priorities Coalition 2010), some version of the trio remains at the heart of political intervention even when the singular rule of any one category is challenged. We must “balance,” “integrate,” or “harmonize,” re-linking formerly antagonistic spheres. As Richard Barringer writes in his introduction to his *Changing Maine, 1960-2010* anthology:

Sustainable development means a break once and for all with the ancient mindset that has pitted economic opportunity against the environment and placed human and community concerns on the

sidelines of the struggle for “progress” and “a better life.” This is the basis of what is known as the “three-legged stool” of sustainability, connecting economic, ecological, and social well-being. (2004, xxix)

Against false conflicts of the past, it appears that the task of sustainable development in Maine is to facilitate “the just and equitable interaction of social, economic and environmental systems” (Phillips and Golden 1993, 193).

One might argue that the pervasive nature of these categories indicates nothing about how seriously they are taken in practical contexts. One of my interviewees, for example, in reference to the tripartite structure of the *Maine Measures of Growth in Progress* (I will call him Chad), suggested that the categories are simply loose reference markers, a clumsy but useful shorthand for something more complex: “It’s a judgment call,” he responded to my query about the distinctions, “I mean, really, they’re all interconnected. I can make wonderful arguments for putting *that* here, putting *that* there. ... For the sake of organization, and really arbitrary, they’re divided” (interview 8). And yet Chad still relied, in our conversation, on a seemingly-stable notion of “Maine’s economy,” asserting that *Measures of Growth* is “kind of a good basic primer about Maine’s economy in terms of numbers” (interview 8). He identified distinct “environmental resource types” who provided input into some of the report’s metrics. And he asked passionately if we are “investing as a society enough in our education, in our health ... and in our community” (interview 8). Indeed, the *Measures of Growth* report would seem to leave little room for radical reinterpretations of its terms given the confident, measurement-backed assertion that “achieving this vision requires a vibrant and sustainable economy supported by vital communities and a healthy environment” (Maine Development Foundation 2013).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The distinction between an ontological and an analytical mobilization of categories must be

Chad oscillated between a stated quasi-indifference to the categorizations and a seemingly-habitual (unacknowledged, yet explicitly present) *reliance* on these distinctions for the coherence of his work and narrative. We can see a similar dynamic at work when Seth Goodall, former state senator from Maine's 19th district, says that, "Maine Democrats believe strongly that the environment is not separate and distinct from the economy, instead it is an important variable in the economic equation that will help Maine grow" (Goodall 2011). Denying the distinction between categories, Goodall at the same time radically re-affirms them and ultimately renders the environment into nothing more than a crucial accessory to econometric calculation. Such oscillation suggests that the distinction between economy, society, and environment constitutes a nearly unavoidable pattern of thought and practice in Maine and beyond. Even when the the actual complexities of policy are acknowledged; when the inevitable boundary-crossing foci of various administrative and advocacy institutions are clearly visible; and when a general sense that "things are much more complicated" is articulated, the trio remains.

This situation in Maine is mirrored by a wider academic literature, particularly within the social sciences. References to the "economic, social, and environmental dimensions" of  $x$ ,  $y$  or  $z$  are too widespread to require citation. Attempts to "bring in the social" to an economic analysis, to assess the "environmental dimensions" of a social situation, or to examine the "economic factors" at play in a particular social conflicts or environmental issues are

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challenged here. As Ingold writes of the concept of "society," "There may well be debate about whether such a thing as society actually exists 'out there', but there can be no doubting the fact that there are people out there who regularly talk about it, and therefore that discourse on society is just as much a part of the reality we study as it is of our way of studying it, if indeed these two can be separated at all" (1996, 47). The same can be said about economy and environment.

continually enacted in ways that assume the stability or self-evidence of the categories themselves. Indeed, entire disciplines are formatted (and invested) so as to assume and affirm the distinction between the economic, the social, and the environmental. Economics, sociology, and environmental science all have these domains as their presumed objects of study, and even hybrid disciplines often presume something distinctly *economic* about the social (economic sociology) or the environmental (environmental economics), something specifically *social* about the economy (institutional and social economics), or something *environmental* about the social (environmental sociology).

Yet isn't all of this, in some sense, so common and pervasive as to be almost unremarkable? Why even take note? We live in a world seemingly-animated by three dynamic domains. We inhabit an economy, a society, and an environment, and we negotiate their complex relationships—successfully or not—in myriad ways. We cross through *multiple* economies, societies and environments depending on our political, spatial and temporal contexts. The relations, tensions and trade-offs between these three domains, in various forms and on various scales, constitute a fundamental context within which many contemporary debates and struggles play out. These terms mark distinct realms of value, distinct configurations of interest, and a host of specific institutional and material formations. Even those seeking to radically reconfigure contemporary modes of life often articulate their work in terms of *rethinking* these three categories, *redefining* their relations, and thus seeking to construct *alternative* economies, *alternative* social relations, or *different* conceptions of the environment. In short, the economic, the social, and the environmental—in myriad forms, contexts, and relations—would seem to constitute the very horizon of modern thought.

## Constitutional Geometry

Economy, society, and environment form what I will call a *constitutional geometry* of contemporary life. Whether overlapped, triangulated, sandwiched, or nested (figure 2), three core dimensions of reality appear as simultaneously distinct and related. We might think here in terms of three variably-relatable positions—hence an array of *geometries* characterized by various permutations of a position A, B and C. Multiple linked terms may occupy these slots, and the specific definitions of the terms in each position may vary: “A,” depending on the formulation, might equal “economy,” “market,” “profit,” or “prosperity”; “B” might include “society,” “community,” “people,” or “ethics”; and “C” might designate “environment,” “ecology,” or “planet” (see table 1). Even the definitions of the terms in each slot

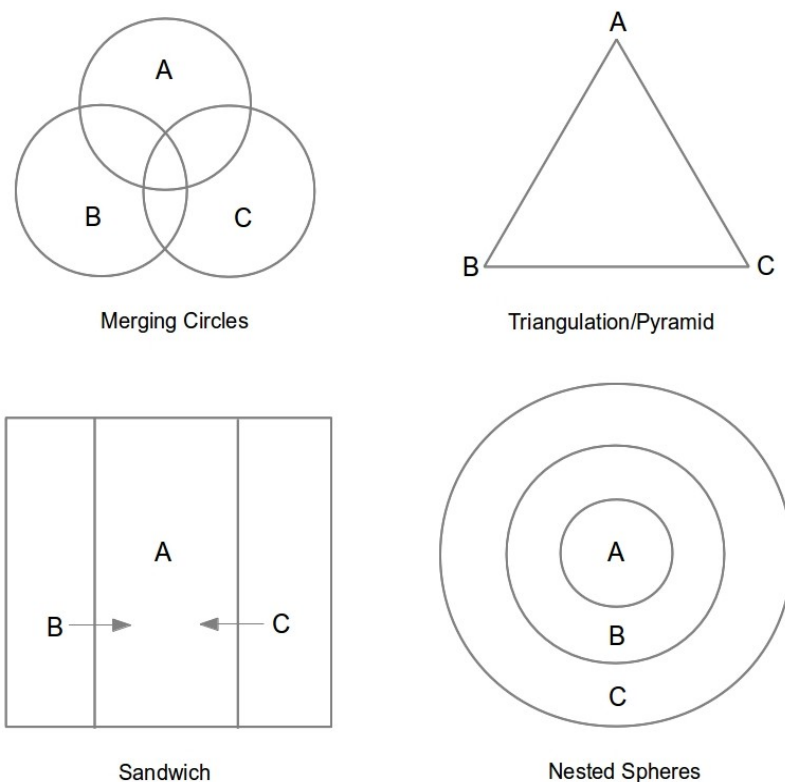


Figure 2. Variable geometries of the trio.

might vary, as in the difference between a neoclassical and Keynesian “economy” (e.g., Best and Widmaier 2006). In all of these variations, however, what remains is a triple geometry marking a similar set of presumed relations.

| A                 | B                | C                  | Maine Sources   | Other Sources   |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| <i>Economy</i>    | <i>Society</i>   | <i>Environment</i> | (Barringer 2004a; Phillips and Golden 1993)   | (Gibbs 2002; Daly and Farley 2010; Munasinghe 1999; Lawn 2001)    |
| <i>Economy</i>    | <i>Community</i> | <i>Environment</i> | (Maine Development Foundation 2013; Barringer 2004b)                                | (Daly and Cobb 1994; Beatley 1997)                                |
| <i>Economy</i>    | <i>Equity</i>    | <i>Environment</i> | (Coastal Enterprises 2009)  | (Campbell 1996; Camagni, Capello, and Nijkamp 1998; Paehlke 2004) |
| <i>Profit</i>     | <i>People</i>    | <i>Planet</i>      | (Graham 2012)   | (Elkington 1998)  |
| <i>Prosperity</i> | <i>People</i>    | <i>Place</i>       | (Reilly and Renski 2008; Governor’s Council on Maine’s Quality of Place 2007; 2008) | (Reid 2009)   |

Table 1. Various vocabularies of the trio.

This geometry is *constitutional* because it founds and continually performs a particular kind of “problem-space” (Scott 2004, 4) within which so much of contemporary political deliberation and struggle play out. It significantly shapes articulations of value, enactments of conflict, and their proposed resolutions, as diverse and complex dynamics, tensions, and conflicts are formatted within the space constituted by the three terms. One cannot easily advocate for nonhuman living beings and their habitats without becoming an “environmentalist,” just as one cannot seek to address human ethical concerns without participating in “social



activism” or “social work,” nor engage with questions of production, consumption, employment, savings, or investment without speaking *of or for* “the economy.” In various ways, these terms subsume and format diverse actions and concerns into a single analytic or ontological triangulation which is then posed as the fundamental terrain on which political struggle and imagination must play out.

In at least three of these geometrical variations of the trio (see figure 2), we find distinct domains articulated in some form of connection or relation, each in some sense *outside* the other. Sustainable development discourses, as I have suggested, commonly articulate this geometry in terms of previously-separated spheres that must now be overlapped. The implication here is that a “sweet spot” can be found—a balance, harmonization or “marriage” (Barringer 2004, xxxi)—between elements that are nonetheless still distinguishable. Discourses of the “triple bottom line” (e.g., Elkington 1998; Bowden, Lane, and Martin 1999; Bisson 2010; Rogers and Ryan 2001) which sometimes articulate the trio in alternate terms such as “people, planet, and profit” (Elkington 1998) or “economy, environment, and equity” (Coastal Enterprises 2009), often *triangulate* the three elements. Such a geometry portrays a connection and interplay while also emphasizing binary differences and (potential) oppositions. Uncoincidentally, perhaps, “economy” is usually positioned in these triangles at the *top* of what one might also view as a pyramid. Such hierarchy is even more apparent in the “sandwich” geometry of neoclassically-influenced environmental economics. Both environment and society are positioned here as *outsides* which must be accounted for in economic (monetized and marketized) terms in order to appear as legitimate objects of intervention and management (Hackett 2006; Jaeger 2005; Wiesmeth 2011). Society is the source of “preferences,” hidden behind a veil of subjectivity but “revealed”

through the monetary behavior that animates markets (Siebert 2008; Wiesmeth 2011). The environment remains the ultimate “externality”—a key source of “external benefits [or costs] generated from production and exchange and enjoyed [or suffered] without payment [or compensation] by members of society” (Hackett 2006, 491, inserts added).

In contrast to the merging circles, the triangle, and the sandwich, a more “radical” version of the trio is presented in many formulations of ecological economics. Opposing the notion that economy, society, and environment constitute three separated spheres or positions that must be linked, ecological economics *nests* the trio like Russian dolls. The economy is a “subsystem” (Costanza et al. 1997; Daly and Farley 2010; Lawn 2001) located within a wider social domain that is, in turn, nested in a planetary ecosystem or environment. As Michael Common and Sigrid Stagl (2005) describe, “The economy is located within the environment, and exchanges energy and matter with it. In making their living, humans extract various kinds of useful things ... from the environment. Humans also put back into the environment the various kinds of wastes that necessarily arise in the making of their living” (2005, 1). Philip Lawn conceptualizes these relations in explicitly ontological terms, where a nested macroeconomy, a “sociosphere,” and an “ecosphere” are seen as characteristic elements of the “logos of nature” (2001, 144).

For Lawn,

the three major spheres of influence represent different systems at varying degrees of complexity. Each can be considered a holon insofar as they manifest the independent and autonomous properties of wholes and the dependent properties of parts. ... The macroeconomy acts as a component of the sociosphere which, in turn, acts as a component of the ecosphere ... In a sense, this makes the sociosphere something akin to the interface between the macroeconomy and the greater ecosphere.” (2001, 144)

Economy, society, and environment have, indeed, been spared in this geometrical articulation from any assumed external separations. Yet the fundamental problem-space itself remains unchanged. We remain in a world of three domains, each animated by distinct dynamics—even “laws”—and each in need of relational reconfiguration relative to the others.<sup>5</sup> In fact, we might say that ecological economics tends to shift us from an *analytic* distinction to a more robust *ontological* one. Each system, now nested rather than simply linked, is viewed in terms of a realist epistemology (Ward 1994) that *systematizes* the domains, rendering them “natural” in the sense of *given* in the world prior to discourse. The trio is alive and well, and the fundamental challenge is to redefine and reconfigure its triple relation. A questioning of the geometry itself remains unthinkable.<sup>6</sup>

### Problematizing the Trio

Yet these categories are *not* simply neutral descriptors of an objective reality that we human subjects and collectivities must navigate. While there is a powerful tendency to project an economy, a society, and an environment across all domains of human life, past and present, thus treating them as universal categories inscribed into the nature of things, this is far from the case. As numerous scholars have shown, these categories are relatively-recent articulations of European modernity,

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5 Lawn, for example, basically accepts a neoclassical (economistic, formal) definition of economy, but seeks to add other elements to it as boundaries, limits, or controls. He writes, for example, that, “The last of the four intermediate macro policy goals, moral growth, is not an economic-related goal because it does not directly involve benefits and costs” (Lawn 2001, 98).

6 Economy, society and environment do not exhaust the landscape of constitutional geometry. Market, society, and state, for example, form another crucial triangulation prominent in some domains of (among others) political science (e.g., Martinussen 1997; Gries, Rosen, and Rosen 2010; Smith and Gómez-Mera 2010) and economic sociology (e.g., Triglia 2002). In the context of this thesis, I take the trio of economy, society and environment as one crucial “entry point” (Resnick and Wolff 1994) into a much wider field of ontological geometries.

arising and developing (roughly) together in the 19th century. It was not possible to speak of the “economy” as a distinct domain of action or object of management until at least the early decades of the 19th century when John Stuart Mill, for example ([1848] 1994), could reference “economic arguments” and “the economy of society” (Schabas 2005; see also Dumont 1977; Tribe 1978; Foucault 2002; 2007a; Polanyi 2001; Rose 1999).<sup>7</sup> Society, similarly, did not constitute a discrete object of concern and intervention until the mid-19th century when Auguste Comte used the term “sociology” (*sociologie*) to refer to a new “science of society” (Pickering 2009, 3; see also Williams 1985; Poovey 1995; Helliwell and Hindess 1999; Rose 1999). And while one could have spoken in a variety of ways about a more-than-human domain of nature prior to that same period, the term “environment” was not coined in English until 1828 when Thomas Carlyle translated Goethe's concept of *umwelt* (Jessop 2012) using this neologism derived from the older verb “to environ” (surround). Only in the 1860s did “the environment” become widespread in social and biological theory, referring to the “context” in which organisms and societies are situated and by which they are shaped or even determined (Luke 1995; Macnaghten and Urry 1998). A whole structure of thought and practice was thus laid out over the course of the 19th century by which people came to find themselves living in a society, confronted by and dependent upon an economy, and surrounded by an (increasingly domesticated) environment.

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7 Timothy Mitchell argues, in contrast, that the modern conception of the economy as a totalizable domain does not pre-exist the mid-twentieth century, when it was produced by a convergence of econometrics and macroeconomic statistical aggregations (1998; 2002; 2008). While this is a crucial specification, Mitchell's dismissal of earlier economic articulations risks eliding important ways in which “the economy” emerged together with its companion categories as a key articulation of industrial, fossil-fueled modernity. I propose to place Mitchell's history of “the economy” as one important permutation in a wider (and older) field of “economic” articulations.

This historical emergence must not be taken as merely a matter of developing new language for spheres of life that already existed; that is, as a discovery by which human investigation exposed an objective reality that was hitherto obscured. The “birth” of economy, society, and environment involved their very *construction* as material domains of experience, subjectivity, measurement, and intervention. “The object,” writes Foucault, “does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations” (2007b, 45). There are no economic, social, and environment “dimensions” that await our discovery of them, and our identifications of such dimensions do not trace or amplify the contours of a nascent, objective distinction awaiting categorization. For an economy, a society, and an environment to exist, they must be produced—*initially*, via their historical emergence as new ways of formatting reality, and *continually*, through ongoing, iterative processes of composition.

While there are many ways to conceptualize the iterative construction of such categories, the approach I take in this thesis emerges from an array of thinkers and theorizations loosely designated by the term “poststructuralism” (Belsey 2002; Chaffee and Lemert 2009; Colebrook 2005; Patton 2008). Most generally, this approach refuses *a priori* assumptions of ontological foundations, teleological trajectories, law-like determinations, and stable essences in favor of a focus on processes of reality construction and “becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Connolly 2011; Braidotti 2013). This should not be confused with “social constructionist” approaches (real or imagined by their detractors) that privilege human subjective interpretations over extra-human materialities (for one salient set

of critiques of such approaches, see Latour 2003; 2005, 88). Post-structuralism in its “new materialist” forms (Braidotti 2000; Coole and Frost 2010; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012) aims to challenge and re-work the very distinctions between subjects and objects, culture and nature, and “values” and “facts” (Barad 2003; Latour 2004; Massumi 2002). It is not the case that there exists, on one hand, a world of objective materiality and, on the other, a sphere of subjective human interpretation. “Just as there are no words with determinate meanings lying in wait as so many candidates for an appropriate representational moment,” writes Karen Barad, “neither are there things with determinate boundaries and properties whirling aimlessly in the void, bereft of agency, historicity, or meaning, which are only to be bestowed from the outside” (2007, 150). Instead, she suggests, “the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity” (2007, 152). Donna Haraway (1992) and John Law (2007) have called this approach “material-semiotics.”

From a poststructuralist perspective, to represent a particular collective struggle in terms of an inherent set of “trade-offs” between “economic,” “social,” or “environmental” necessities is to occlude the fact that the very *terms* of such a conflict are themselves produced through struggle and the contingent convergence of multiple material-semiotic processes.<sup>8</sup> In a crucial sense, then, the categories of economy, society, and environment are “performative.” This is to say that they directly participate in constituting the reality that they claim only to designate or represent (Austin 1975; Butler 1993; Gibson-Graham 2006). In a material-semiotic approach, this performativity is understood not simply as the way in which “words make worlds” (Cornwall 2007), but as the “intra-active” process (Barad 2007, 152)

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<sup>8</sup> Bruce Braun and Joel Wainwright (2001) make a similar argument regarding concepts of “nature” and “rainforest” in struggles over socio-ecological futures (and pasts) in British Columbia.

through which multiple “vital” elements (Bennett 2010), including words, concepts, objects, and agencies of various kinds, come together to compose more or less durable stabilizations or “assemblages” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).<sup>9</sup> Economy, society, and environment are performed into being through what John Law describes as “the provisional assembly of productive, heterogeneous, and ... quite limited forms of ordering located in no larger overall order” (2009, 146).

For both Deleuze and Foucault—to whom much of material-semiotic theory is indebted—such processes of assembly are always enacted in the context of specific *problems* that they both respond to and produce (Deleuze 1994; Foucault 2001). In Foucault's terms, economy, society, and environment can be understood as “problematizations” in three simultaneous senses (Koopman 2013). First, they emerge as situated *responses* to particular problematics present in early modern life, for example: How to govern in the context of increasingly-pervasive market relations? How to engage an increasingly domesticated and divided ecological world? Second, they represent particular historical processes by which “certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes)” are *made* “problems” in specific ways (Foucault 2001, 171): *economic* problems, *social* problems, *environmental* problems, and later, problems of their (re)connection or integration. Third, and finally, economy, society, and environment may potentially *become problematic* as unstable assemblages that cannot contain the “mess” (Law 2004) they purport to organize. The extent to which their assembly is able to render itself durable and mitigate this final sense of problematization is the extent to which economy, society, and environment become “hegemonic.”

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<sup>9</sup> I will further elaborate my use of the concept of “assemblage” in chapter 3.

Indeed, economy, society, and environment have, in Maine and elsewhere, become what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call “hegemonic articulations” (2001, 68). They constitute a constellation of material-discursive assemblages that cover over (though never wholly successfully) their own contingent production and come to appear as the singular space of thought and practice for a given collectivity. Most practically, to say that a particular economy, society, and environment is hegemonic in Maine is to say that particular constructions of the economic, the social, and the environmental have become for many people obvious realities, key elements of an inevitable context in which human action must unfold. What are the contours of this obvious reality and how is it produced and sustained? I can only sketch a brief caricature that, as I will show in subsequent chapters, is both indispensable for tracing hegemony and deeply problematic for challenging and overcoming it.

*Major Problems: Ontologizing, Systematizing, Hierarchizing*

Economy, society, and environment are most often constituted in forms that Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “molar.” They are “unifiable, total-izable, [and] organizable ” (1987, 33, insert added), categories in which difference is subordinated to, or seen as derivative of, a larger unity or identity. Complex elements of the world are sorted and sliced according to a particular set of criteria, becoming “economic elements,” “social dimensions,” or “environmental factors.” While criteria may differ between definitional regimes—“economy” in formalist economics being quite different from “economy” in Polanyian substantive anthropology, for example (Polanyi 1977)—the categories themselves demand that one knows “beforehand”



what makes something economic, social, or environmental (Çaliskan and Callon 2009). Even when ostensibly derived from empirical observation, these categories function as if they pre-existed the populations of elements which inhabit them. Moreover, these molarities are also quite often, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, "major" categories: they are defined "by the power (*pouvoir*) of constants" (1987, 101) or of singular standards. Majorities are not understood here in quantitative terms (as in a majority vote), but rather in terms of a power-takeover that subordinates variation to similarity. To be major is to enforce or conform to a dominant norm that renders differences into derivative variations. "Majority implies a constant," describe Deleuze and Guattari, "serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate" (1987, 105). Economy, society, and environment constitute domains which become their own measure or standard, or, variously become the measures of *each other* as the three categories vie for priority. Is it economically viable? Is this socially acceptable? Are the environmental standards adequately enforced? These are examples of majoritarian questions.

In a very general sense, we can identify a number of dangers that inhere in major molarities. First, and perhaps foremost, such categories are easily ontologized—rendered into objective descriptions and enactments of the structure of reality itself (Connolly 2002, 184). Economy, society, and environment (among other molarities) frequently make their own power-laden construction invisible by claiming to simply name or identify that which already exists. In so doing, they function to constitute a seemingly-unproblematic terrain within which a whole host of problems are framed. The background context of debate and struggle—the framing itself—is depoliticized when rendered invisible *as itself* a site of potential contestation and transformation. Second, and related to this, molar categories easily

shift from a descriptive function to an explanatory one. Once they have been identified to exist in the world, economy, society, and environment can be studied as objects, and constituted as relatively discrete and systematic domains in which particular patterns, processes and even laws can be “discovered.” They become sites of what Deleuze and Guattari call “royal science,” where the irreducible complexities of *problems* are captured by a theoretical reduction that seeks “to define equivalent relations by discovering, on the one hand, the independent variables that can be combined to form a structure and, on the other hand, the correlates that entail one another within each structure” (1987, 234). Once such dynamics have been posited, these domains become capable of confronting us from beyond with demands, constraints, and necessities. Rather than opening the field of possibility (creation), we find ourselves trapped in a web of pre-determined limits.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, in such a scenario it is all-too-easy for any one of the molar categories to claim the mantle of King. We are thus encouraged to think in terms of which domain rules all others (even if by prescribing limits) and which should or must therefore be prioritized. Conflicts between domains unfold predictably: environmentalists understand that “the environment” is primary, conditioning and constraining all else; social advocates see that questions of equity and well-being in human society are primary, or that “social capital precedes rather than follows upon general economic prosperity” (Barringer 2004, xxxii), providing the foundation upon which the health of all other relations depends; and economists know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that we need a strong economy before we can afford the luxury of adequately caring for either the environment or the poor (Ashworth 1995;

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<sup>10</sup> Some of which we may have yet to discover, but which exist nonetheless.

Grossman and Krueger 1995; Beckerman 1992; Hollander 2004). Everybody is right, everybody is wrong, and hardly anybody, it seems, is engaged in the politics of *problematizing this very field of problematization itself*.

But what, more precisely, is at stake when the specific categories of economy, society, and environment are ontologized, systematized, or hierarchized? In the domain of economy, Glyn Daly, J.K. Gibson-Graham, and Jenny Cameron have generated powerful critiques of the ways in which “the economy” (particularly in its capitalist form) is often fixed as a “common sense” domain appearing to pre-exist its discursive articulation (Daly 1991; Gibson-Graham 1995; 2006; Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003). In neoclassical, Keynesian, and Marxist formulations alike, “economic space is derived as an analytic construction—that is, as an a priori unity—whose internal logic, or 'laws' remains constant in every social formation” (Daly 1991, 81). This systematic economy is commonly constituted as a kind of organic body, “a bounded totality made up of hierarchically ordered parts and energized by an immanent life force” (Gibson-Graham 1995, 33). Unfolding from this image is a politics simultaneously bound up in a fantasy of economic mastery and utterly subordinated to an inevitable economic necessity. The economy is, in Gibson-Graham's analysis, “at once the scene of abject submission, the social site that constrains activities at all others sites, and the supreme being whose dictates must unquestioningly be obeyed as well as an entity that is subject to our full understanding and subsequent manipulation” (1995, 29–30). At either pole of this oscillation, the economy is positioned as a singular (albeit internally differentiated) site of social determination, a key domain through which all political articulations, proposals, or struggles must pass if they are to be taken seriously (Gibson-Graham 2006c, xxi). What this often amounts to is a hijacking of the political via the

insertion of necessity and incontestability into spaces that otherwise might constitute sites of collective transformation (Unger 1978; Gibson-Graham 1995; Swanson 2008).

The category of “society” or “the social,” in the molar sense, has been similarly critiqued. Despite constituting the very ground for the concept of “social construction,” society is often posed—at least since Durkheim—as an actually-existing objective domain (Latour 2005, 13). As Marilyn Strathern describes:

‘Society’ [has been] reified as an individual thing, set up as an entity in antithesis to entities of a similar conceptual order: society versus economy, the material world, even biology or nature. Although these could be seen as conceptual domains carved out of human life, thought of as ‘things’ they [appear] to have an identity prior to their being brought into relation. (1996, 51)

Society is constituted, specifically, as an aggregate of *individuals* (Strathern 1996; Helliwell and Hindess 1999) who can also be lumped together at smaller scales as “communities.” Individuals are variously seen to constitute society or to be constituted by it, but this oscillation itself remains the assumed terrain of debate (Latour 2011a, 8). The molar aggregate of society is easily stabilized as “a bounded totality or whole that is formed of the sum of its parts” (Ingold 1996, 47), and thus can be seen as animated by particular “laws” and necessities. Far from demanding explanation, it stands as the *source* of explanation itself—a force of action, influence, and anonymous agency in the world. As Bruno Latour (2005) argues, this articulation of society functions—not unlike “economy” and often in concert with it—to effectively shut down a tracing of the actual, complex stakes involved in the negotiations and struggles between various humans and nonhumans in contemporary life. By homogenizing certain human actors, separating them both from other human aggregates and from nonhuman actors, and then claiming for

itself a *sui generis* reality and power of determination, “society” effectively “play[s] the role of a substitute for politics” (Latour 2005, 162).

Turning to “the environment,” similar patterns are repeated despite the sense in which this category so often appears as an *outside* in relation to which economy and society stand as *insides*. A core characteristic of molarities persists: constituted as an objective (ontologized) domain or sphere, the environment appears at once as something that we are inside of and something that remains external to us. “The term ‘the environment,’” writes Fern Wickson, “gives the impression of an identifiable thing that exists separate and distinct from ourselves; something that surrounds us, something that we use, but something that always remains an ‘other’” (2012). Tim Ingold identifies this dual sense as the “two views of the environment” (Ingold 1993, 30), the *lifeworld* inside of which we subsist, and the *globe* which stands beyond us as an object of our inquiry or intervention. As that which surrounds us (*environs*), the environment is constituted as a “context,” a larger envelopment within which—and in relation to which—the dynamics of society and economy play out. As that which confronts us from beyond, the environment stands as a domain of things to be used or protected, something about which we can “take stock” (Ingold 2009, 154).<sup>11</sup> In either of these images—the very same kind of oscillation we find in economy and society—we can see both a relation of mastery and of subordination. The environment as a molar domain is *resource* or *recourse*: that which we use and manage at will, a site of domestication and rule

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11 In his essay on “Globes and Spheres” (1993), Ingold appears to make this distinction in order to endorse the “sphere” notion at the expense of the “globe.” In later work, however, he develops a radical reconceptualisation of “environment” that, in my reading, goes beyond either concept as well as the distinction itself (e.g., Ingold 2009; 2010). The globe and sphere images can still be usefully mobilized to point toward two conventional dimensions of “environmental” articulation.

(Luke 1995; 1997), or that to which objective appeals can be made in order to “stop politics” (Latour 2004a).

Significant critical scholarly work has focused on each of the three categories in turn, challenging the ways in which their presumed distinction, objectivity, systematicity, and hierarchisation variously function to cover over radical difference, support assertions of necessity, limit imaginative political spaces, and render a politics of the categories themselves invisible.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, a host of scholarship has located itself at various sites of pairing between the categories, seeking to interrogate and often reconfigure their relationships: *economy-society* (e.g., Adaman, Devine, and Ozkaynak 2003; Sauvage 1996; Dobbin 2004; Granovetter and Swedberg 1992; B. Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008; Swedberg 2003; Tonkiss 2006); *society-environment* (e.g., Carter and Charles 2009; Cudworth 2002; Gual and Norgaard 2010; Harden 2012; Meht and Ouellet 1995; Weber 2003; White 2006; Woodgate and Redclift 1998); and *economy-environment* (e.g., Adaman and Özkaynak 2002; Gouldson and Roberts 2000; Perrings 1998; Scott-Cato 2011; Wainwright and Barnes 2009).<sup>13</sup> Yet surprisingly little critical work has engaged economy, society, and environment *as a trio* (for a notable, but brief and only suggestive, exception see Giddings, Hopwood, and O’Brien 2002). It is as if only two balls can be juggled at one time, or as if one of the three fields must remain tacitly stabilized as a foundation for thought and action, lest reality itself begin to unravel.

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12 I have cited a number of these already, including Latour 2005; 2004; Luke 1995; Helliwell and Hindess 1999; Mitchell 1998; 2002; Rose 1999; Rose and Miller 2008; Strathern 1996. But see also critical work in feminist economics (e.g., Waring 1988; Ferber and Nelson 2003; 2009; Nelson 1997; Folbre 2001; Mellor 1997) and ecofeminism, notably Plumwood 1993; 2002.

13 We can see these intersections in the form of key hybrid disciplines themselves: economic sociology, economic anthropology, social economics, environmental sociology, environmental geography, social ecology, environmental economics, and ecological economics.

This is a serious oversight given that the three categories are intimately interrelated—even co-constituted—on numerous levels. Indeed, to hearken back to the brief historical sketch offered earlier, economy, society, and environment can be said to have been born roughly together, as assemblages of the same historical formation or “stratum” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Deleuze 1988a), and the sense and stability of each is constituted by the others. One does not simply encounter (much less resolve) a conflict between an “economy,” a “society,” and an “environment”; these categories co-construct the very context within which such conflicts appear.

Economy, society, and environment can be said to operate within or, perhaps more accurately, to *effectuate* a fundamental, binarising “abstract machine” of modernity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 71). Whether it goes by the name of “Rene Descartes” and his ontological dualisms or by the notion of the “bifurcation of nature” (Whitehead 1920), the binary machine configures a topology of possible articulations around the divisions between nature/culture, subject/object, fact/value which the trio both enacts and is enacted by (figure 3).<sup>14</sup> To use an overly voluntaristic metaphor, one might think of it as a palette of options: any member of the trio can be linked with “nature” as a way to either transform its elements into a collection of passive, exploitable objects to be mined and utilized (nature as resource) or to render its elements foundational, sovereign, determinate or “necessary” (nature as recourse). At the same time, economy, society or environment can be posed as manifestations of the “culture” pole, and thus either rendered into illusory “social constructions” or problematic “ideologies,” collections of subjective preferences, or sites of a “cultural” agency imposed on its passive

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14 There are other “machines” at work in the larger process of what Deleuze calls a “diagram” of power (Deleuze 1988a, 34). I will elaborate a more detailed picture in chapter 4. The discussion here is intended merely to provide an illustration of some key problems that the trio presents.

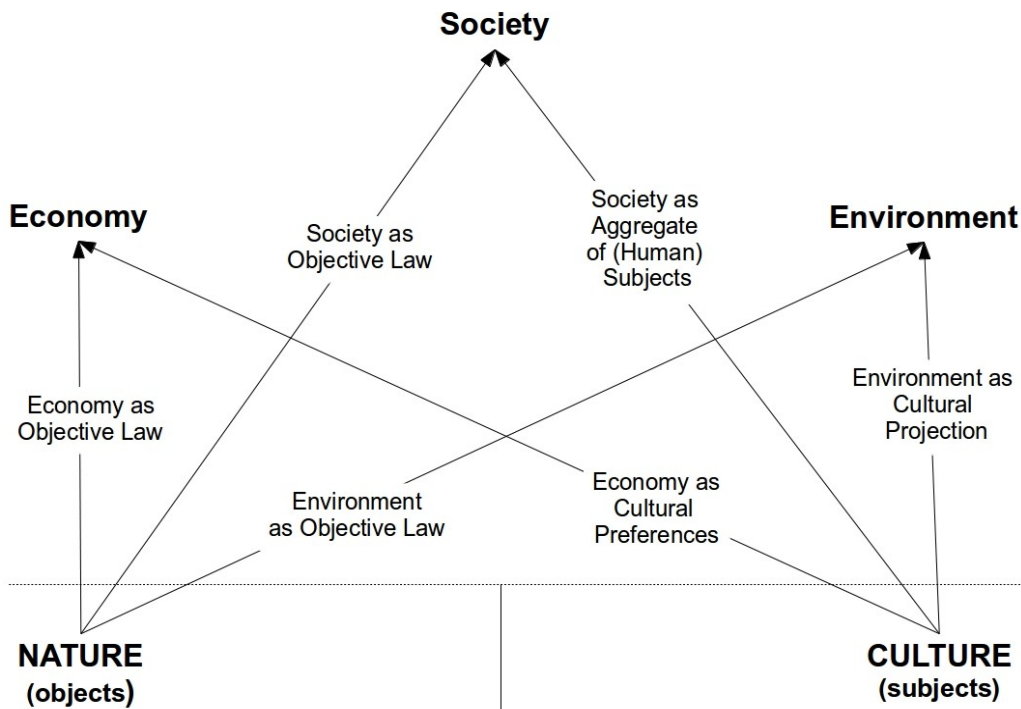


Figure 3. Elements of the trio as effects of a nature/culture binary.

material substrate. One could map the combinations of these options and how they have played out in various philosophies and political struggles. In all cases, each domain can be pitted against the others, appearing to be independent while all the while “secretly” constituted by a shared diagram of power of which their conflict is only a contingent effect.

Politics bounces around, then, in this strange, multiply-triangulated binary space that divides some humans from others (as in racist naturalizations), humans from nonhumans, agency from its objects, monetized livelihood activities from all others, and at the same time is able to both naturalize these arrangements and pose them as subjective projections without ever challenging the very abstract machine of bifurcation itself. This is another way to describe the “forked tongue of the



moderns” elaborated so effectively by Bruno Latour (1993). What it translates to, effectively, in Maine (and elsewhere) is a political space in which a contest is played out between (at least) two groups vying for claims to represent a sovereign power: one one hand, those who appeal to an economic necessity—via “market forces” and the “business climate”—that demands social and environmental compromise and adaptation, and on the other hand those who appeal to the laws of Nature, the sovereignty of the environment and its fundamental “limits.” Both positions, as antithetical as they first appear, in fact reproduce the same ontological ground.

In the context of a particular hegemonic formation that we might—problematically but indispensably—call “capitalism,” the diagram manifests as a widespread naturalization of a particular mode of economic development oriented toward export-driven growth, whether in the form of natural resource extraction or tourism (Lachance 2006), privatization of services and resources (O’Hara 2010), public policy focused on the “business climate” as a primary driver of desired development (Noblet and Gabe 2007; MBLÉ 2002), and the ongoing prioritization of the owners of capital in public policy decisions (The Brookings Institution 2006). Economy and economic development are pitted against key social and ecological concerns including rising inequality and poverty (Acheson 2007), traditional forms of community and connection (Barringer 2010), climate change action (Frumhoff et al. 2007), wilderness preservation (Pidot et al. 2008; Kellett and St. Pierre 1996) and the development of sustainable local and regional food systems (Gabe, McConnon Jr., and Kersbergen 2011). Even organizations advocating for many of these concerns often appear to accept the boundaries imposed by conventional ontologies, as when environmentalist opponents of a 2007 resort development in the northern Maine woods limited their alternative economic proposals to ecotourism (i.e., another

unstable export industry) (Didisheim and De Wan 2006), or when the “progressive” edge of climate change action takes the form of large-scale corporate development of industrial wind farms on fragile alpine mountain summits (Carter 2011). In general, the ongoing effectuation of the binary machine enables the terrain of political dispute and action to remain trapped in a domain in which capitalist livelihood relations, human domination of ecosystems, and divisions between those who care about “making a living” and those who care about “Bambi” all appear to be inevitable. Is this not a terrible trap from which we must find an exit?

It is an unsettling question. Much of environmental politics, for example, has been built around the presumed antagonism between human society and its environment, or between an “out of control growth economy” and its ecological context. Thus it would seem that the solution would involve a reassertion of the supremacy of the environment—of Nature—over and above human systems. If however, the very articulation of this Nature was born alongside the economy and society it purports to stand above, then to what source of authority or law are we to appeal? What kind of politics might we construct beyond the regime of what Mick Smith (2011) has called “ecological sovereignty,” that is, the stabilization of “nature” as an objective and incontestable source of authority? Opening and engaging such a question is one of the key tasks of this thesis.

### **“That Which Is Falling...”: The Trio Unravels**

While critical analysis may show the categories of economy, society and environment to be ethically and politically problematic in multiple ways, this trio is at the same time undergoing a *crisis* of which academic critique may be only a

symptom. Said differently, the hegemonic articulation is not wholly successful in warding off the third sense of “problematization” discussed above: the rendering-problematic and unstable of categories by their own impossibility as final closures. Indeed, the complex “imbroglios” of humans and nonhumans described by Bruno Latour (1993; 1998; 2004a; 2011b) are increasingly rendering the distinction between a nonhuman “nature” and a human “culture” untenable, and thus destabilizing the binarising abstract machine itself. Where once one might have genuinely believed in a Nature and a Culture, there is now a growing sense that things are substantially more complicated, and perhaps disastrously so. As Latour writes, “There is no distant place anymore. And along with distance, objectivity is gone as well; or at least, an older notion of objectivity that was unable to take into account the active subject of history. ... the very notion of objectivity has been totally subverted by the presence of humans in the phenomena to be described” (2014, 1). Where, for example, is a purified “nature” in a geological era—the “anthropocene”—that can now be designated with the very *name* of “humanity” (Crutzen 2002; Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill 2007; Zalasiewicz et al. 2011)?

This dynamic relative to economy, society and environment can be dramatized with two juxtaposed illustrations. If we examine statistical trends associated with the anthropogenic “forcing” of climate change, there is a clear transformation that begins somewhere around the middle of the 19th century. Figure 4 shows such a movement in terms of rising observed carbon dioxide levels since 1850 (Knorr 2009), tracing one way in which humanity has been increasingly constituted as “a collective being capable of geomorphic force” (Yusoff 2013, 779). This graph can be placed in relation to another quite different image. Figure 5

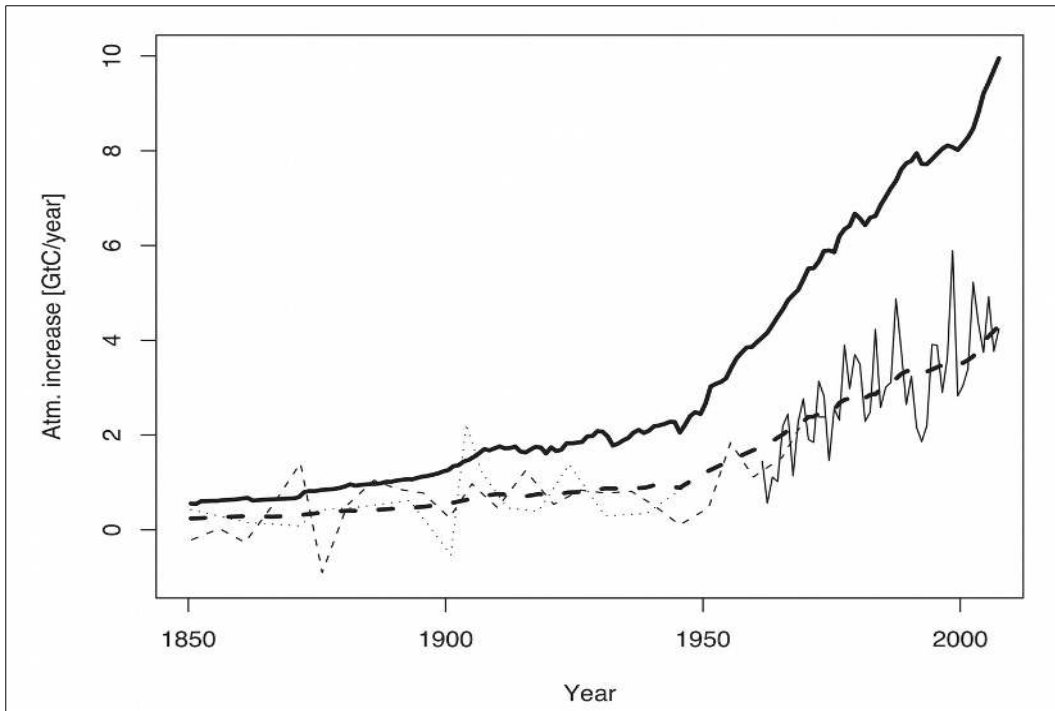


Figure 4. Atmospheric increases of carbon dioxide levels, 1850 to 2000 (Knorr 2009).

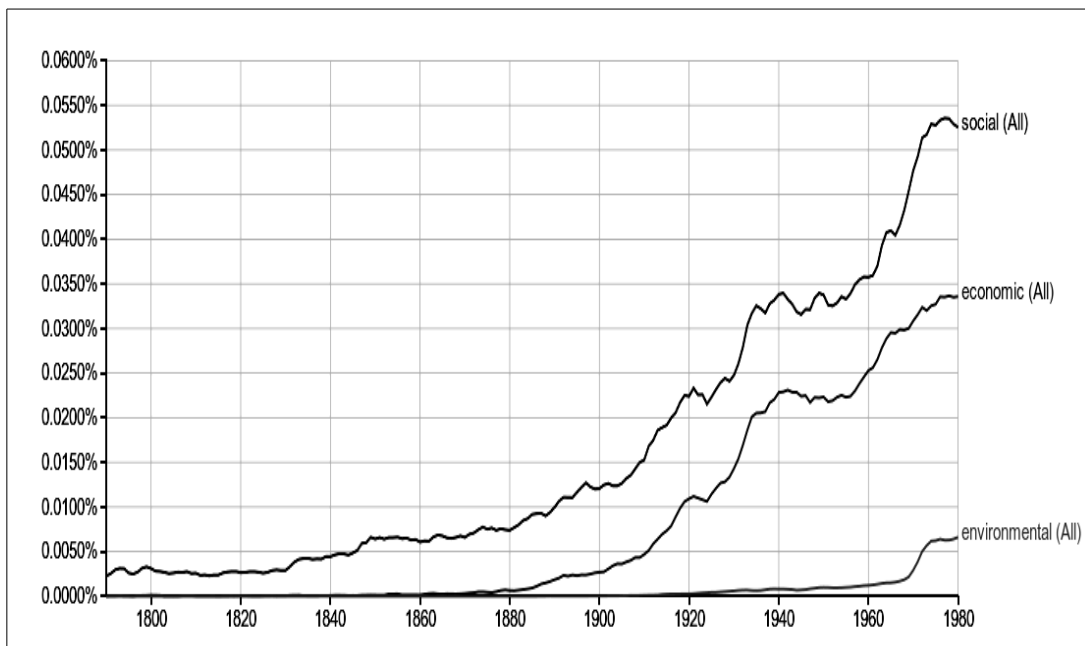


Figure 5. Relative frequency of printed usage of the terms "social", "economic", and "environmental" in the Google Books corpus, 1790 to 1980. Source: Google n-gram.

shows a Google “n-gram,” drawing from Google's digitized corpus, of the relative frequency of usage of the terms “the economy,” “the environment,” and “the social” from 1750 to 1980.<sup>15</sup> There is a clear parallel with CO2 levels: a discourse of economy, society, and environment was born at the very same moment that Europeans were beginning to transform fossil fuels into a massive industrial-technological complex and a vast accompanying expulsion of geomorphic gas. The anthropocene, we might say, has been produced *by* and *as* this triple separation. Yet figure 5 is misleading. In figure 6, one can see what happens when the timeline is extended to 2008: there is, suddenly, a dramatic *divergence* between discourses of the trio and levels of CO2. Why does the CO2 graph keep rising—dramatically, with no end in sight—while uses of the terms “social”, “economic”, and “environmental”

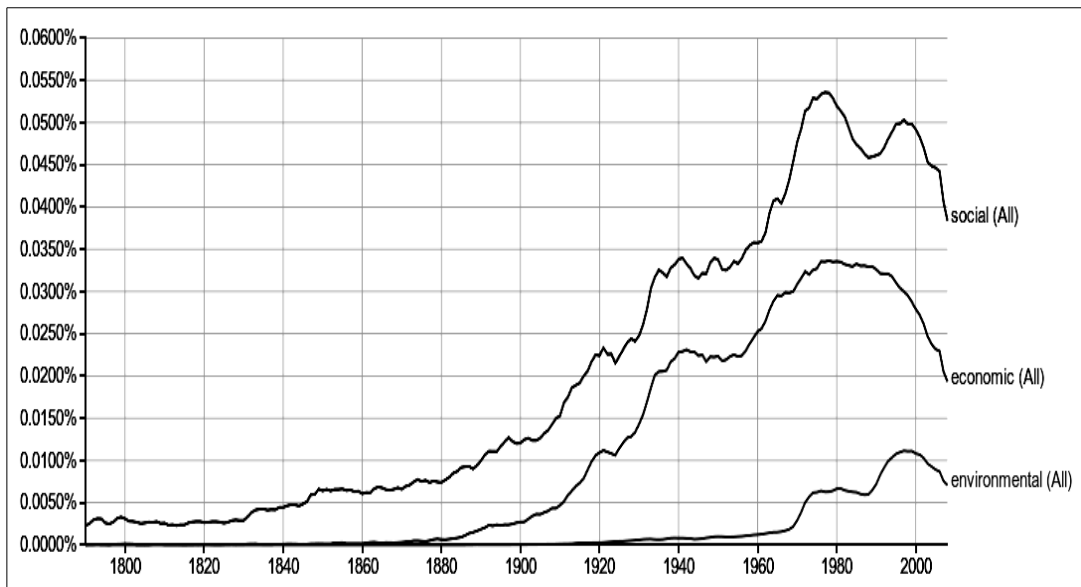


Figure 6. Relative frequency of printed usage of the terms "social", "economic", and "environmental" in the Google Books corpus, 1790 to 2008. Source: Google n-gram.

15 Adjective forms of the terms were used for consistency, since the results from a “society” search are skewed by uses of that term by organizations (as in The Humane Society). This is far from ideal in terms of a certain analytical “accuracy”; however, I do not intend show these graphs as “empirical evidence,” but rather to dramatize a narrative that can be substantiated by other means, including arguments found in this and subsequent chapters of this thesis.

level off or decline from the 1980s on? One might speculate that at the very moment when public awareness about the possibility of anthropogenic climate change begins (Chakrabarty 2009, 198), at the time that Bill McKibben could write *The End of Nature* (1989) and argue that human intervention had fully conquered the wild, the *sense* of the constitutive categories of the anthropocene began to crumble. Facing an increasing inability to effectively distinguish between the domains—as interdependencies and imbroglios endlessly proliferate—the categories of economy, society, and environment themselves begin to lose their ontological status as *givens*. The insane acceleration of the “geomorphic force” of human fossil energy-leaves behind the very categories that it birthed and was birthed by.

The crisis dramatized by these juxtaposed graphs is quite tangible in Maine. As I will describe further in chapter 2, I interviewed forty professionals involved specifically in work oriented around the categories of economy, society, and environment. Despite an overt discursive and material investment in the categories via institutional names and divisions, language mobilised in publications and media interactions, and even in professed identities (“economic developer,” “social worker,” “environmental activist,” etc.), many of my interviewees *resisted* the categorizations. In some cases, resistance took the form of evasion, with interviewees eliding my attempts to format the conversation in terms of the trio, instead describing the details of their daily work in terms of specific meetings, projects, negotiations, and interventions. In other instances interviewees answered my questions but with visible discomfort—hesitation not reducible to a reaction from an unexpected query. One state-wide development agency director went so far as to question the validity of my project framing. Focusing on these distinct categories, he said, “is wrong. It’ll get you to some place, but it won’t get you to talking about the things... the whole

package that makes us good” (Chad, interview 8). Another interviewee, the director of a state-wide rural development coalition, rejected the trio outright as “false divisions” (Harriet, interview 14). Over and over again, I encountered deep hesitations, qualifications, and even rejections of a formatting of the world in terms of economy, society, and environment. It is as if “everyone knows” that these categories no longer adequately name the processes and dynamics in which we find ourselves.

Yet at the same time that “everyone knows” the trio is in crisis, “everyone” also resorts to the very categories that they (we) resist. The development agency director cited above had few alternatives to offer when critiquing the triple categorization, and most of our conversation was riddled with references to “the economy” as a distinct sphere, and to the importance of generating “basic facts” that could form the basis for objective policy conversations (interview 8). For all of the talk about the categories as merely analytic, arbitrary, blurred, or even false, economy, society, and environment continue to significantly structure the discourse and action of most of my interviewees. It is as if my presentation of the trio served to reflect back to them a self-image that they wanted to refuse, an articulation seen as problematic only from an outside that our conversation helped to generate. Economy, society, and environment are terms that we can neither fully endorse nor yet think without.

It is in this sense I will refer to the elements of this trio, following Ulrich Beck, as “zombie categories,” that is, as “living dead’ categories which govern our thinking but are not really able to capture the contemporary milieu” (Beck 2001, 262). Despite a growing sense that these categories are problematic, we still seem to

“need” them—or, perhaps more accurately, they continue to produce and sustain their own necessities or demands. We might even wonder if the crisis of some categories works to reinstate the stability of others, even if in creeping zombie forms. The discourse of “society,” for example, has been challenged since at least the early 1980s with the rise of Regan and Thatcher, yet “community” has been strengthened in its place (Rose 1999; Rose and Miller 2008), still holding the third space of a social, often-homogenized or essentialised “outside” to the economy that it animates, that it serves, or that purports to be in its service. Perhaps more potently, though, is the sense in which the domain of economy appears to overcome threats by *swallowing* the other domains-in-crisis. There is a discourse of the “post-social” (for example Cabrera 2004; Cetina 2001; Lowe 2004), and an even more public discourse of the “post-environmental” (for diverse articulations, see Nordhaus and Shellenberger 1981; Young 1990; Nordhaus and Shellenberger 2007; 2009; 2011; Castree 2003; Buck 2013) and the “post-ecologist” (Blühdorn 2000; Blühdorn and Welsh 2013; Szerszynski 2007), but there is little talk—in academia or otherwise—about a “post-economic.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Nordhaus and Shellenberger's widely-cited work on “post-environmentalism” (2007; 2009; 2011) embraces the dissolution of a nature/culture binary in favor of a deeply anthropocentric, pro-capitalist, Promethean developmentalism that would seem to sit quite comfortably with a wider trend to “reconcile” the economy-environment tension by privatizing, monetizing, and commodifying ecological relations (Robertson 2012; Turnhout et al. 2013). In one sense, then, it matters very little whether a zombie is dead or alive

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16 One exception, which only proves the rule, is Kahn and Wiener's *The Year 2000*, where “post-economic” signifies a hyper-affluent world of abundance where resource scarcity has been overcome and “the economic” (which refers here to the allocation of scarce resources) has rendered itself obsolete through its very success (Kahn and Wiener 1967).



when one has been captured by it. In another sense, however, an understanding of the zombie *as zombie* might enable us to more effectively prepare defenses, enact “counter spells” (Pignarre and Stengers 2011), and discover how to follow Nietzsche's Zarathustra (1969, 226) in *pushing* that which is already falling.<sup>17</sup>

### “...Should Also Be Pushed”: The Project of This Thesis

It is now possible to fully articulate the task of this thesis. A particular historical formation has captured us in multiple ways, shaping the horizon of political possibility through ongoing articulations of a hegemonic economy, society, and environment. At the same time, this formation is in crisis, collapsing under the weight of its own compositional force and traversed by multiple cracks and ruptures. Many people working to imagine more just and viable pathways of development are perched on a difficult threshold: neither able to fully let go of “zombie” articulations, nor wholly able to leave them behind. And yet ethical calls toward care, justice, and solidarity with fellow human and nonhuman “earthlings” (Latour 2011) demand a radical reconfiguration. We can no longer sustain thought and action formatted along the lines of an economy, a society, and an environment. We must imagine and compose new ways of life, new assemblages that call forth new possibilities for negotiating collective sustenance on a volatile planet. As Guattari writes, “the problem ... is not to put up bridges between already fully constituted and fully delimited domains, but to put in place new theoretical and practical machines, capable of sweeping away the old stratifications, and of

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<sup>17</sup> “That which is falling should also be pushed” (Nietzsche 1969, 226).

establishing the condition for a new exercise of desire” (2008, 156). What does this look like? With what categories, concepts and modes of thought might we effectively participate in such an experiment in living? How can the action of thought join with other forms of action to strengthen and connect particularly fruitful “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 203) that are already escaping conventional articulations? This thesis is intended as an experimental scholarly engagement with these questions, with the goal of strengthening and focusing future action research and organizing practice.

## Chapter 2

# Methods and Strategies

The purpose of this excursion is to write theory, i.e., to produce a patterned vision of how to move and what to fear in the topography of an impossible but all-too-real present, in order to find an absent, but perhaps also possible, other present. (Haraway 1992, 295)

### Introduction

How, then, to proceed? I intend neither to invest my work entirely in a critical analysis of the hegemonic articulations of economy, society, and environment, nor to wholly eschew such critique in the name of generating positive affects and creating alternatives. Yet I find myself navigating a significant tension within some realms of contemporary radical scholarship that can be described in terms of two closely-related axes. On one axis is a conflict between activist-scholars who view critique as an essential practice of debunking hegemonic narratives and revealing some form of truth about a world torn by suffering and oppression (e.g., Fine 2003; Mallavarapu and Prasad 2006; Wyly 2009; Foster 2012), and those who argue instead that critical practice has “run out of steam” (Latour 2004b), is hopelessly bound up in paralyzing realist presumptions, and should be abandoned in favor of more generative approaches (e.g., Latour 2004b; Gibson-Graham 2006b). On the other axis lies a related tension between those who believe in the ongoing necessity of engaging and analyzing relations of power, violence, and exclusion in order to incite outrage and constitute opposition (see, for example, Dean 2012); and those who seek avidly to avoid the resentment (Newman 2000), “left melancholy”

(W. Brown 1999), or “paranoia” (Sedgwick 2003; Gibson-Graham 2006b) that such approaches risk generating.<sup>18</sup> These two axes boil down to two apparent choices: *critique* or *create*.

If there is, in fact, any substance to these tensions as I have characterized them (I recognize the dangers of caricature here), then I refuse to choose. All of the work that follows in these pages can be read as an attempt to undo or evade these two axes and the conflicts they generate. In various ways, I will argue that critique is at once crucial to any project of substantive transformation, and, at the same time, does not require one to claim access to a singular truth nor to stand with certainty in the judge's seat. Creation, too, is necessary, yet risks its own forms of conceit, complicity, and capture if not accompanied by some form of critical work. I seek to explore—and hopefully enact—the proposition that critique and creation, in forms that are no longer mutually-exclusive, can and must constitute two interdependent moments of a larger process of transformative and performative world-making. The stakes of this proposition are high and quite personal, for my own commitments in Maine—the site of my “fieldwork,” but also my long-time home—straddle the worlds of “opposition” and “alternatives” (Williams 2005, 40), and demand that both remain active and mutually co-constitutive.

What I seek to explore is what Michael Hardt refers to as a “militant biopolitics” that escapes a seeming either/or between critique and creation and instead enables us “to struggle against the life we are given and to make a new life, *against* this world and *for* another” (2010, 34, emphasis added). While Hardt arrives at the glimmers of such a politics via Foucault's readings of Kant and his

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<sup>18</sup> See the forthcoming symposium in *Rethinking Marxism* (2015, vol. 27, issue 3) oriented around papers by Jodi Dean and Stephen Healy for an example of this tension in action.

genealogies of ancient Greek “truth-telling” (*parrhesia*), my journey in this thesis is significantly informed by the work of Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). In the methods that I will describe further below, and at a number of other key moments, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts—among those of many others—will serve as catalysts, sources, and tools for engaging the problem(s) of economy, society, and environment in ways that are variously critical and creative, destructive and constructive, protective and exposing. My aim is to experiment with seeing and constituting realities in multiple ways at once, thus loosening the grip of any particular ontological assertion so that transformative possibility might be glimpsed and cultivated.

This chapter elaborates on the methods I have deployed in this project. In the first part of the chapter, I situate my research in the context of Maine and describe the specifics of my fieldwork interviews and my particular approach to interviewing. Following this, I elaborate my broad methodological approach in terms of “post-qualitative” research practice and explore what a shift from *interpretive* analysis to *inventive* analysis might entail for my project. Finally, I describe the three core methodological strategies or “movements” that animate the this thesis and also structure its three subsequent parts (II, III, and IV). These are what I call the movements of “tracing,” “decomposing,” and “(re)composing”, and taken together they enable an approach to empirical fieldwork that is at once critical, deconstructive, and creative—confronting forms of hegemony, exposing its limits, and suggesting pathways toward other modes of collective life.

## Situating Engagement

To engage the problems of economy, society, and environment described in chapter 1, I have opted for a research approach that stages generative encounters between contemporary political theory and qualitative fieldwork “on the ground” in Maine. My fieldwork, primarily in the form of forty semi-structured interviews with professionals working in economic, social, and environmental domains, is not intended to constitute a “case study,” and nor is my theoretical engagement intended as the filter or frame through which qualitative data is then “interpreted.” Rather, I aim to shuttle back-and-forth between the two domains, allowing each to be informed and transformed by the other. The theory that I draw upon and further develop in this thesis functions as a set of tools for constituting particular forms of attention, practices of reading, and sensitivities to closures and openings. The shapes of my theorizations, and the directions in which they move, are directly informed by my fieldwork in Maine, particularly because the conceptual developments in this thesis are aimed at informing future organizing work and action research in this place. My fieldwork constitutes less a collection of “data” than a particular moment of participation in a field of discourse and action in which I intend to intervene.

### *Maine: Grounded Research*

The state of Maine is the primary research site engaged in this thesis, and it is also my home. Located in the farthest northeastern corner of the United States (figure 7), Maine is widely known for its harsh winters, rocky coastlines, extensive

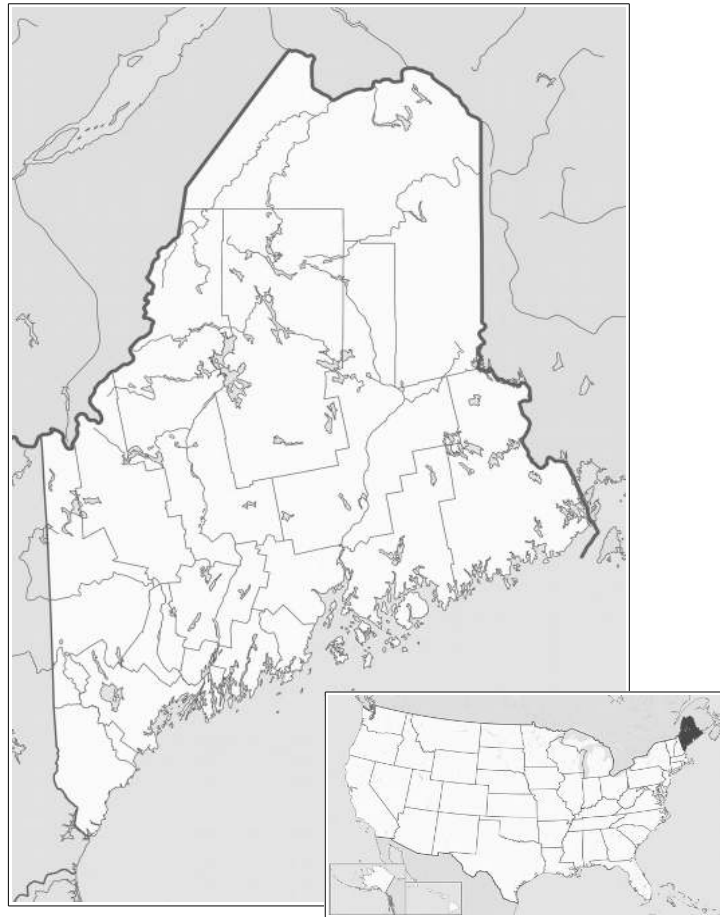


Figure 7. The State of Maine (Image source: Wikimedia Commons).

forests and wild lakes, not to mention the lobsters and moose whose images adorn much of the state's tourist propaganda. With over 3,500 miles of ragged coastline, an archipelago of 4,600 coastal islands, more than 250 rivers, 2,200 lakes, and 17.7 million acres of forest, human livelihoods in the state of Maine have long been bound together with the living abundance of land and waters (Barton, White, and Cogbill 2012; Colgan 2006; Judd 2000; Judd and Beach 2003; Rolde 2001). Since its invasion and colonisation by European settlers beginning in the late 17th century (Rolde 2004), the subsequent enforced rise of market-based livelihoods in the 19th century (Judd 2000) and the consolidation of “the economy” as a measured aggregate in the mid-20th (Mitchell 1998), Maine's living abundance has often been

figured in terms of “natural resources,” a vast stockpile of potential inputs for various forms of production and sale. Formerly a hinterland of Massachusetts, Maine has functioned for centuries as a kind of internal colony (Osborn 1974)—at once a source of inputs for industrial production, a site for locating low-wage manufacturing, and a recreational escape for the wealthy whose industrial endeavors have made their own places unlivable. It is the perfect set-up, we might say, for a constellation of tensions between an economy, a society (often in the form of “Maine communities” or Maine’s “sense of community”), and an environment. Indeed, over the past five decades, shifting extractive resource practices and changes in industry configurations have increasingly collided with heightened concerns for the well-being of nonhuman species and ecosystems (Judd and Beach 2003; Rolde 2001), and Maine has emerged as a significant site of conflict over how “we” (the very definition of which is at stake) should live together on a shared earth.

Amidst this conflict, Maine is also an excellent “living laboratory” in which to experiment with alternative forms of political articulation. A significantly rural state with a relatively small population (1.5 million people), Maine is home to a complex and variously interconnected patchwork of indigenous communities, working-class settler families with deep generational roots, wealthy seasonal residents, baby boomer “back-to-the-landers,” East African refugees, and young aspiring organic farmers (among many others). A long-standing set of cultural and political traditions, including the informal mutual-aid of rural “neighborliness” and the direct democracy forum of the New England town meeting (Palmer et al. 2009) function to create unusual spaces for (potential) interaction across difference, even as these traditions also constitute sites of significant exclusion.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Maine’s

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<sup>19</sup> Thus they are sites of struggle. The hope is that *having* such sites might constitute new openings



commonly-shared self-image as “a place apart” (Palmer et al. 2009, 5), unique from the rest of the United States, may contribute to a collective sense that Maine is willing to break with some of the dominant significations of “typical” American places. Palmer et al., for example, note that Maine has carved out a distinctive landscape of political values in both protecting the state’s “environment” and in asserting stronger social programs than many other states via a “communitarian attitude of ‘taking care of one’s own’” (Palmer et al. 2009, 6). Whether such an assertion is fueled more by a certain *image* of Maine than by actual program differences or spending priorities, it indicates a discursive field which offers significant resources for engaging in public conversation.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Maine is known to have a relatively informal and accessible political culture which enables comparatively high degrees of (potential) interaction between policy-makers and citizens.<sup>21</sup> One can imagine, in Maine more than many other states, effectively inserting new forms of political articulation into the wider field of public contestation and institution. Whether they “work” or not is a different question, but the site for experimentation is (relatively) open.

My choice of Maine as a research site is far from arbitrary. I have lived, studied, worked, and pursued social transformation efforts with a variety of

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for transformation.

20 In Palmer et al’s own book, for example, we can see that Maine spends only 0.4% more on public assistance than other states (2009, 134), a difference which may be due more to the low incomes of rural people than to a distinctly “caring” political culture. Forbes, for what it is worth (perhaps not much) ranked Maine 25th in their 2007 “Greenest States” list (Forbes.com 2007).

21 Relative to larger states such as New York, for example, Maine’s governance structure is small, with fewer professional politicians (Maine has a “citizen” legislature in which most members work other jobs in their home communities) and a culture of comparative informality when it comes to policy-making interaction. Grassroots activists, business lobbyists, legislators and state officials frequently interact, communicate and negotiate familiar relationships in a state capital (Augusta) populated by less than 20,000 people (the third-smallest in the U.S.).

organizations in the state for more than eighteen years, building a diverse array of relationships. In 2001, I co-founded a cooperative subsistence farm and intentional community in Greene, Maine known as “The JED Collective,” and this remains the place where I and my family reside, along with nine others. Maine is my home, and it is the place to which I am committed for the “long haul” (Horton 1998) in both a personal and political sense. This thesis is as much a formal completion of my doctoral studies as it is a personal—and inevitably collective—process of mapping possibilities for future action and intervention in Maine. Though the thinking and theorizing enacted in these pages is not aimed at wide accessibility and circulation in the state, it functions for me as a laboratory in which to work through key conceptualizations that might animate more publicly-oriented work in the future.

### *Thematic Entry Points and Sources*

A critical and generative investigation of economy, society, and environment in Maine could have taken any number of forms. One might begin, for example, with a case study in which none of the three categories can be clearly distinguished, or in which the work of various practitioners calls the distinctions into question in fundamental ways. One could begin by examining a series of situations in which a conflict has been publicly formatted in terms of “economy versus environment” or “community versus economy.” I have chosen as my wholly-provisional “entry point” (Resnick and Wolff 1994) what may seem like an all-too-literal approach. I have gone directly to those people whose daily work is ostensibly oriented around each of the three categories. Between November 2012 and December 2013, I conducted forty interviews with Maine professionals working in policy and advocacy fields

directly articulated around the categories of economy, society and environment: economic development workers, social workers, and environmental advocates, among others.

There is a clear danger in this choice of focus. In actively framing my research around the three categories I seek to challenge and displace, and in seeking people whose work is instituted in terms of these categories, I risk performatively reinforcing the economy, society, and environment trio. This is a peril to which I will remain attentive in the analysis that follows. At the same time, however, a direct encounter with the three categories—and, indeed, my own participation in constituting them at this moment of encounter—can be leveraged as a strategic tool for transformative research. As Deleuze and Guattari write, a molar articulation (such as economy, society, or environment) “is most interesting when there is a musician, painter, writer, philosopher to oppose it, who even fabricates it in order to oppose it, like a springboard to jump from” (1987, 295). My purpose in taking on the categories of economy, society, and environment “head-on,” so to speak, is to unwork them at the points of what might seem to be their greatest strength and coherence, to find lines of flight toward other possibilities, and to attempt creative recompositions even at the very heart of their strongest professional articulations.

I have thus chosen my interviewees primarily by seeking clear and distinct instances of the “economic,” the “social,” and the “environmental” among government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private consulting firms in Maine. In particular, I have aimed to speak with people whose organizations explicitly identify their work as pertaining to one of the three categories, whether via the organizational name or mission statement,<sup>22</sup> whose work is addressed either

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<sup>22</sup> There is no doubt that the work of all of my interviewees cuts across and through the three

to statewide policy and action or to regional-scale work (i.e., at the level of the county or economic development district), and who have had at least five years of experience working in their particular field. Drawing on web searches, word-of-mouth inquiries, and prior knowledge of Maine's political advocacy and policy fields, I identified a large pool of potential interviewees matching these criteria in each of the three categories. Invitations were prioritized so as to generate a collection of interviews in each category that spanned multiple political perspectives, included people working in a diversity of institutional types (government, non-profit, and private), and generated a relatively broad geographic spread. While my collection of interviews has not been designed as “representative” of some larger statistical aggregate, I have intentionally sought to engage a wide array of people in conversation to ensure depth and breadth of content.

Of forty total interviews completed, fourteen were located in the “economy” domain, fourteen in the “society/community” domain, and twelve in the “environment” domain (see Appendix A). Interviewees working on “economy” included a regional economic analyst, a government economist, a private economic development consultant, an economic development network director, a regional planner, directors of a number of nonprofit and quasi-public economic development institutions, and the director of an economic policy think-tank. The realm of “society/community” necessarily involved connecting with a somewhat more diverse array of professionals, including the CEO of a major regional social services organization, directors of a community foundation and a community loan fund, social workers, advocates working for social policy non-profit organizations, the

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categories into which their work was divided. I was careful, however, to look for organizations that clearly identify with one category over the other in their public presentation.

director of a statewide community service office, and the director of a community health organization. “Environment” interviews included people working for environmental advocacy nonprofits, environmental scientists working for state or quasi-state agencies, the owner of an environmentally-oriented energy business, a non-profit environmental policy researcher, and the director of an academic environmental research program.<sup>23</sup>

### *Interview Methods and Process*

A conventional (one might even say “hegemonic”) notion of the interview tends to present the interviewer as a detached observer, asking questions so as to “maximize the flow of valid, reliable information while minimizing distortions of what the respondent knows ” (Holstein and Gubrium 2003, 67). Pursuing such an approach, I would have engaged my interviewees with as little prompting and interference as possible, seeking to uncover what they “really” think or how they “really” talk about their realities even in my absence. As an “objective” researcher, I would be the terminal port of what Holstein and Gubrium call a “one-way pipeline for transporting knowledge” (2004, 143). The actual practice of my interviews, however, could not be much farther from such an image. Following in the footsteps of a variety of critical, feminist, and action research traditions that view fieldwork as an active, situated process of intervention in the world (e.g., Cameron and Gibson 2005; Castree 2010; Giardina and Denzin 2011; Gibson-Graham 2006b; Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007; Maggie MacLure 2010; McDowell 1992; McTaggart 1991; Weis and

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<sup>23</sup> The interviews completed for this project were approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Ethics Research Committee, approval number H9867.

Fine 2004), I pursued my interviews as dynamic and potentially transformative mutual encounters (Schostak 2006, 15). I understand my interviewees not as sources to be mined for “data,” but rather as collaborators and co-thinkers whom I have engaged in multi-layered, “non-innocent conversations” (Haraway 1991, 199; quoted in Jackson 2003, 706).

From the outset, in my initial contacts with potential interviewees and in my introductions prior to the start of our interviews, I was clear about my intentions for the project. The information sheet that accompanied my interview invitations (see Appendix B) stated, for example, that my project intended “to explore some of the core assumptions that drive development policy and regional planning in the state and to investigate how different assumptions might lead to different options and potential outcomes.” Even these “outcomes” were not left vague, as I proposed to ask:

How might we create new forms of shared understanding about the relationship between economy, society, and environment that can help to animate effective collective action toward more equitable and sustainable livelihoods in Maine? (project information sheet)

These framings were re-iterated at the start of each interview, along with an explanation of my intention to spark provocative conversation—neither to debate nor to simply listen, but rather to *think together* about the pressing concerns that the categories of economy, society, and environment shape and express.

A typical interview lasted between ninety minutes and two hours, and was loosely guided by a set of orienting questions and prompting propositions. My focus was to facilitate the unfolding of an exploratory and dynamic conversation around the key terms “economy,” “society/community,” and “environment” as they appeared (or not) in the specific work of the interviewee and in the wider field of policy

advocacy and implementation in Maine. Conversations often began with a general discussion of the nature of my interviewee's work and then moved into questions of definition. I would ask, for example: "So you're called an 'economic developer,' and you're therefore developing something called an 'economy.' What is that thing to you? What *is* it, exactly, that you're aspiring to develop?" From there, each interview took its own course and my interview guide—which changed substantially over the course of my fieldwork—served primarily as an *ad hoc* source for prompts and to ensure that the conversation covered themes related to all three categories. At various points in most interviews, I also posed specific and purposefully-provocative propositions, sometimes even challenging a perspective offered by my interviewee as a way to spark new turns in the conversation. A number of such interventions are described in subsequent chapters.

In reading and listening to my interviews during the analysis and writing phases of this project, I have often been surprised about the conceptual depth and richness my interviewees offered. Did I expect them to be “dupes,” mindlessly reproducing the logics of their institutions? Not at all. But I was not prepared for the complexity and nuance of their thinking relative to the problematic simplicity of the public literatures many of their organizations produce, and nor was I expecting that their articulations would be capable of entering into such close and productive relations with the theoretical literatures I brought to the project. One dimension of my surprise is, most certainly, my own (quite problematic) bias, perhaps internalized from a leftist critical milieu that tends to reduce complex people to cogs in the bureaucratic machine. But it also raises an important methodological question: Did I problematically “lead” my interviewees to generate the kinds of clear, relevant and sometimes quite theoretically-astute comments that I will

explore in subsequent chapters?<sup>24</sup> The answer is both “yes” and “no.” On one hand, it was precisely my intention to challenge my interviewees toward nuanced conversations about concepts and their ethico-political implications, and many of them met me in this space with careful attention and thoughtful engagement. On the other hand, many of my interviewees' most incisive responses emerged with little or no direct prompting, and the magnitude of my own learning and transformation in the process of listening to them is a mark of their relatively autonomous nature.

The very notion of “leading the interviewee” must, in fact, be challenged in this situation, for two reasons. First, it remains a vestige of the “pipeline” model described above (Holstein and Gubrium 2004), in which the quality of the interview is viewed as dependent on the minimization of influence from the interviewer. If an interview is understood, however, as an “inter-view” (Schostak 2006), that is, as an encounter that is “unavoidably collaborative” (Holstein and Gubrium 2003, 68) and intended to generate transformations of collective understanding, then a much more nuanced understanding of conversational dynamics is needed. In a dynamic conversation, the “lead” can be a shifting role, as each participant's matters of concern meet, are negotiated, and then shape new directions for engagement. There are, indeed, dynamics of power at play in every conversation, and the roles of interviewer/interviewee introduce particular relational expectations. But this beckons toward the second limit of the notion of “leading”: How can one locate the locus of “power” in an interview dynamic prior to the specific unfolding of the dynamic itself? We must be wary, as Jensen and Lauritsen (2005) argue, of

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<sup>24</sup> This question was, in fact, raised by an anonymous reviewer of a paper I wrote based on my interviews with economic developers (Miller 2014).



essentializing power relations and obscuring the ways in which power dynamics can shift and morph in different contexts and at different moments. Indeed, I could not easily locate the singular source of “power” during the process of my interviews. Who is leading whom? While at times I may have assumed a “powerful” role as the questioning researcher, most of my interviewees were outspoken leaders in their fields who did not hesitate to direct the conversation in new directions—even, in a number of cases, turning the tables to ask questions of *me*. What emerged in these interviews was the outcome of a complex, dynamic negotiation in which our diverse matters of concern could *meet*, and in which space was made for unexpected lines of flight to emerge.

This was precisely in line with the intention of my research, for I am ultimately less interested in attempting to gain a “God's eye view” (Putnam 1981) of how things “really” are, or what my interviewees “really” think, than in exploring what might emerge from a different kind of conversation. What is it possible for my interviewees to think when challenged in particular ways? What might professional practitioners of the economic, the social, and the environmental *become* if enrolled into new discourses, new framings, and new material-semiotic associations? As an “active interviewer,” I sought to “converse with respondents in such a way that alternate considerations are brought into play” (Holstein and Gubrium 2003, 75). In this sense, my interviews were *experiments* seeking to learn something about how, in John Schostak's terms, “articulations can shift, or be made to shift, or seduced into shifting” (2006, 21).

## Methods of Analysis

How, then, do I read these experimental interviews? In a general sense, I enact what has been recently referred to in terms of “post-qualitative” method (St. Pierre 2011; 2013; Lather and St. Pierre 2013; Lather 2013; MacLure 2013; Martin and Kamberelis 2013). The “post” here does not indicate a rejection of the qualitative *per se*, but rather its radical rethinking in light of key poststructuralist and posthumanist insights drawn particularly from Barad, Haraway, Deleuze, and Guattari (Lather 2013). Post-qualitative methods seek, first and foremost, to challenge “interpretivism,” the approach that views data as a stable set of sources from which various representations of truth can be drawn. As Alicia Youngblood Jackson writes, referencing Lather (2000), “Language is not transparent, voices do not speak for themselves, and referents always slip away. There is always an excess to knowing, and efforts to ‘translate’ voices into representations of research data are no more than a ‘knowing disruption’” (Jackson 2003, 704). Whereas interpretation “falls into the representational trap of trying to figure out what the interviewee really means” (Lenz-Taguchi 2012, 269), post-qualitative methods seek to mobilize data as *events* from which new relations and possibilities might be born (Lenz-Taguchi 2012; Jackson and Mazzei 2013). Data is not coded, categorized, or discretely packaged in such a method, but is instead “lived in new ways” (Lather 2013, 639).

Hillevi Lenz-Taguchi's notion of “diffractive analysis” is useful here. Drawing on Haraway (1991) and Barad (2007), she proposes that “whereas reflexivity or reflection invites the illusion of mirroring of essential or fixed positions, diffraction entails the processing of ongoing differences” (Lenz-Taguchi 2012, 268). In optics, diffraction occurs when waves encounter obstacles, morph, and

then interfere with one another, thus constituting an accumulation of “differences that make a difference” (Barad 2007, 72). A diffractive analysis does not produce an interpretation of data so much as it seeks to *place this data in new relations* that enable us to “imagine what newness might be incited from it” (Lenz-Taguchi 2012, 270). It is a matter of *making* meaning rather than discovering it, of participating in “thinking as a process of co-constitution” (2012, 271). This is what I seek to do with the “data” I have collected in my fieldwork, and with the other sources I have gathered: to mobilize them in the name of creation, to place them in relation in ways that might generate new openings and possibilities, and to engage in a mode of scholarship that is, in Lenz-Taguchi's terms, “simultaneously about *intervention* and *invention*” (2012, 278, emphasis in original).

My particular enactment of post-qualitative methods in this thesis involves a number of dimensions that I will describe below: rendering my interviews and interviewees into multiplicities and zones of “becoming” rather than as singular, static entities; the “plugging in” of multiple sources into a research assemblage; the development and mobilization of “figurations,” and a careful self-reflexive navigation of my own relations to these various experimental processes.

### *Interviews as Multiplicities*

In a conventional analysis of interview data, it might be assumed that there is a single subject—the interviewee—speaking in a single voice, expressing their own, unique point of view (e.g., Seidman 2006, 95). It is, indeed, the case that each interview is a singular event, expressive of a whole array of identifiable and ineffable convergent relations; but I propose to view my interviews and

interviewees as *multiplicities* rather than as “molar” unities (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Lisa Mazzei (2013) describes this approach in terms of the “voice without organs,” drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) figure of the “body without organs.” Rather than assuming a fully-formed and unified speaking body, composed of discrete parts subordinated to a whole, Mazzei proposes that “voice in postqualitative inquiry becomes an entanglement of desires, intensities, and flows” (2013, 735) from which multiple becomings might emerge. Jackson (2003) develops a similar concept of “rhizovocality,” drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's image of the “rhizome” that has no center and is propagated by multiple, extensive connections (1987, 6).

These formulations do not suggest that “anything goes” in the encounter of interview data, since a multiplicity must never be confused with an empty space or a blank canvas. The impossibility of fixing a single meaning as emanating from a single source does not call for a relinquishment of meaning-making, but rather for the composition of a different methodological relation to the process. In concrete terms: I had a very real encounter with someone I am calling a “social worker.” What just happened? What did they say? What did I say? What did we say together? What did we fail to say? What multiple, conflicting, contradictory, unsettling, surprising, and conventional articulations emerged from that conversation? It is a matter of recognizing that there is no single “reality” that can be made present in a given encounter, but rather *multiple realities* that co-exist and often conflict. Some may become stronger and more visible than others, but they nonetheless never attain the status of *the* singular real. Jackson and Mazzei therefore advocate for “working the same 'data chunks' repeatedly to 'deform [them], to make [them] groan and protest' (Foucault 1980, 22–23) with an

overabundance of meaning, which in turn not only creates new knowledge but also shows [their] suppleness” (Jackson and Mazzei 2013, 264). This is how I seek to read my interviews.

The notions of the “voice without organs” and “rhizovocality” imply more than just a multiplying of articulations *within* each interview. There is, additionally, a crucial sense in which my interviews must be read *together* as elements of a wider field of expression, multiplicity, and becoming. A voice writes Mazzei, “cannot be thought as existing separately from the milieu in which it exists, it cannot be thought as emanating 'from' an individual person. There is no separate, individual person, no participant in an interview study to which a single voice can be linked—all are entangled” (2013, 734). It is not just the case—as in Lacanian theory—that “language speaks the subject rather than the other way around” (Homer 2005, 45), but also that the event of speaking is an expression of myriad material-semiotic relations from which *both* language and subject emerge. The voice is one element in the articulation of an assemblage that exceeds it. This is a complex way of saying that the words spoken by my interviewees are not just “theirs,” and thus they can also be read together as *assemblage expressions*—articulating not only hegemonic formations, but also “irruptions of resistance, transgression ... which, in their excess, disrupt homogeneity” (Jackson 2003, 707). As will become apparent further below and in chapters to follow, I read my interviews both as expressions of individual people criss-crossed by multiple becomings, and as expressions of a wider field of articulation from which they emerge and in which they participate.

*Plugging Texts Together, Assembling Figurations*

Interviews are not, of course, my only sources in this thesis. At the very heart of the method(s) I employ is a convening and mixing of multiple and diverse elements; that is, the production of a “research assemblage” (Fox and Alldred 2014; Gale, Turner, and McKenzie 2013; Masny 2013; Ringrose and Renold 2014).<sup>25</sup> My research entails transformative encounters between interviews and interviewees, Maine government and advocacy institutions, readings of Maine policy literature, theoretical texts, my own experiences living and working in Maine, and the demands of dissertation writing and academic performance (among other elements). Jackson and Mazzei provide a useful image for thinking about how such a convergence might work, and what it might do. Again following Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 4), they speak of “plugging one text into another” (Jackson and Mazzei 2013). The term “text” can be understood here quite broadly as any instance of expression or articulation. What I am staging in this thesis is such a plugging-together between multiple texts, composing relations by which they “constitute one another and in doing so create something new” (Jackson and Mazzei 2013, 264).

One might be tempted to read the chapters that follow in terms of an “oscillation” between what Lois Weis and Michelle Fine refer to as “theory ‘in the clouds’ and empirical materials ‘on the ground’” (2004, xiii). Indeed, there is a movement between close readings of interviews and more conceptual explications, and this movement grows in intensity toward the end of the thesis. I do, moreover,

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25 Another language to refer to a method assemblage is that of the “hybrid research collective” (Callon and Rabeharisoa 2003; 2007; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010; Cameron, Gibson, and Hill 2014) which entails a coming-together of multiple human and nonhuman actants around particular “matters of concern.” I do not highlight this term because I am unsure of whether many of the elements in the assemblage(s) I have convened can be said to share matters of concern. This is, perhaps, a question for further exploration and experimentation.

hope that theory in this thesis can “proliferate through sustained entanglement and interference with its objects ” (MacLure 2011, 998) and that the nature of these objects can be transformed in and through their encounter with theory. At the same time, however, I have attempted to avoid treating Maine solely as the site of the “empirical” and my theory texts as exclusive sites of the “theoretical.” I seek instead to read and combine sources in ways that scramble these distinctions. Following Jodi Kaufmann, I view empirical matter as “any actual or virtual object, event, or intensity that can be read ” (2011, 149), and concepts as particular modes of experimenting with the transformation of such matter into new configurations of expression. In the chapters that follow, I draw concepts from my interviews and my readings alike, assuming my interviewees to be just as capable of producing new forms of knowledge as the philosophers and social science scholars I also engage.

One strategy that emerges from the process of “plugging in,” particularly between interviewees and theory texts, is what Rosi Braidotti (1994) and Donna Haraway (1992) refer to as “figuration.” Neither fully literal nor wholly metaphorical (Wilson 2009, 501), figurations are concrete articulations that enable us to give new narrative forms to particular webs of relation. In Braidotti's words, they are “politically informed images that portray ... complex interaction” (1994, 4). The “zombie” that I have already invoked in chapter 1 is one example of a figuration, and more will emerge as this thesis unfolds. At various points, I will attempt to condense and embody an argument into an image or a presence. A number of these—as is often the case when post-qualitative researchers use this method (St. Pierre 1997, 283)—are taken directly from my interviews. Readers will thus encounter not only zombies, but defensive talismans, prisms, a fog bank, and a kaleidoscope. While seemingly whimsical, I follow Elizabeth St. Pierre in proposing that such figurations

are not “fights of fancy imagined to distract us from the day-to-day, but carefully considered trajectories that send us headlong into the complexity of living realities” (1997, 281). They are sites where the “empirical” and the “theoretical” become inextricably linked, and thus they are tools for enabling and encouraging such linkage. I hope, as well, that they make for a better story.

### *Loving My Monsters*

In all of this playful (yet quite serious) composition, where am I, the author, located? On one hand, it might seem that a post-qualitative approach dissolves specificities into the murky depths of the “voice without organs,” and thus renders my role as an articulator marginal or invisible. Will my figurations appear to speak for themselves? On the other hand, does a break with interpretivism in fact *free* me to become the master of a new world? Can I compose at will, taking apart interviews and other texts and reassembling them in any combination that I find to be useful or inspiring? These questions are not as opposed to each other as they might seem, for both of them assume that I am standing apart from that which I write about. Both questions are underwritten by a modernist binary in which one either reveals objective truth or entirely fabricates it (Latour 2004b).

My position relative to this project is, in fact, quite specifically located. First and foremost, my commitments in Maine are strong and numerous. I have chosen to risk research in a place where I also intend to live and work for the long haul. I have committed to my interviewees, as well as to numerous friends and collaborators in the state, that I will share this thesis with them. However obscure my writing and thinking may be in these pages for those reading outside specialized academic



circles, it may nonetheless be exposed to many of the people about whom it speaks; and I, in turn, will be exposed by this exposure. Furthermore, as an activist-academic located in the relatively small state of Maine, I will be working with many of my interviewees—if not directly, then at least in some proximity—in years to come. In short, I must live with the consequences of what I write here. This constitutes for me, at both a personal and professional level, a very direct form of accountability for the methodological approaches I take, the concepts I use and develop, and the empirical pictures that I compose and present.

My role in crafting the articulations I present here should be clear, since I have written myself into this text in various ways. And neither is my ability to re-work reality in these pages unlimited. Rather, I can say that any attempt on my part to “master” the terrain of multiplicity and make it say and do as I wish would result only in an arrangement of words on paper; and to the extent that I indulge in such hubris is the extent to which this collection of pages would, in fact, *do* very little in the world. The limits of my capacity to experiment with what a diffractive analysis can enact are limits that emerge in a negotiation between my own imaginative, analytical shortcomings and the multiple ways in which the world itself resists being made differently. There is no good way to tell “beforehand” whether I have gone too far, taking my creative impulse beyond its threshold of practical effectivity. This can only be known by what happens with this text and its ideas as they circulate in the world, passing or failing various “trials of strength” (Latour 1988, 158), and as the intuitions, concepts, and figurations developed here take on (or fail to take on) other lives beyond these pages. My own ethical task is to learn to “love the monsters” I have composed here (Latour 2011), caring for them, taking responsibility for them, discerning when to become vulnerable in the presence of

their demands and when to protect myself and others from their mutations—and, perhaps most importantly, learning when to let them go.

### Strategies

I have thus far described my fieldwork site, my interview practices, and the broad contours of a post-qualitative methodology assemblage. What remains is to articulate the specific strategies by which I will deploy all of these elements. The analytical and compositional work that unfolds in the subsequent three parts (seven chapters) of this thesis is animated by three *movements* which I aim to place at the service of a larger movement of generative, experimental thought: *tracing*, *decomposing*, and *(re)composing*. Each movement is crucial to the project, and it is their combination that I believe may offer another version of Hardt's militant biopolitics, at once enabling us “to *attack* ... in order to make [things] new” and to *care* in order to “make of this world another world” (Hardt 2010, 31, emphasis added). The movement of “tracing” critically examines hegemonic articulations of economy, society, and environment, showing their complicity in wider configurations of power that close off ethical and political possibility. “Decomposing” aims to destabilize these articulations—and the critical narrative itself—by amplifying hesitations, proliferating meanings, and exploring unexpected possibilities for intervention. “(Re)composing,” finally, attempts to formulate new concepts that might help strengthen emerging new forms of life, imagination, and political action.

These are the three movements of what Deleuze and Guattari call a “pragmatics” (1987, 146), a practice of thinking that forcefully emerges from and at

the same time articulates a *problem*, and then wrestles with this problem to break it open and find its cracks, ruptures and lines of flight. Pragmatics does not seek simply to trace the contours of that which has entrapped us, but neither does it shy away from such engagement. Rather, its tracing moment aims only to create a kind of protective “counter-spell” (Pignarre and Stengers 2011) that might enable us to escape entrapment and to avoid recapture in the name of a process of counter-hegemonic destabilization and alter-hegemonic construction. In Eugene Holland's words, pragmatics “scans the virtual realm from within a problematic state of affairs in order to map its potential to become otherwise, in order to re-submerge inert islands of apparent being in the oceanic flux of becoming with a view to actualizing something else, something different, something better” (2013, 21).<sup>26</sup> It is a multi-moment enactment of a process of thinking that seeks to intervene in the composition of assemblages and their conditions of possibility.

### *Tracing*

The first movement of the thesis, which constitutes Part II (chapters 3 and 4), is *tracing*. I draw this term from Deleuze and Guattari, who use it to refer to the reproduction of a “ready-made” hegemonic actuality (1987, 13). As practices of critical articulation, tracings “always come back 'to the same'” (1987, 12), reiterating and thus stabilizing the material-semiotic performances of particular assemblages.

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26 This methodological process is not unlike the flow of argument in Gibson-Graham's *A Postcapitalist Politics* (2006a), where she moves from a critique of hegemonic “capitalocentric” discourse and subjectivation (tracing), through a destabilization of dominant economic representations via a multiplication of economic sites (unsettling), to the experimental construction of a counterhegemonic discourse of community economy (recomposition). Indeed, my approach is deeply indebted to this work, even if I am framing it here primarily in terms of a Deleuzoguattarian “pragmatics.”

Tracing is the practice that is often associated with (left) critique: a description of the ways in which a wide variety of phenomena, entities, processes, and discourses are all “in fact” merely elements in a hegemonic formation of power (Latour 2004b). Eve Sedgwick calls this the “Christmas effect,” referring to the way in which Christmas can become a hegemonic (and heteronormative) alignment in which “all institutions speak with one voice” (1993, 5). Elsewhere, she writes of the same tendency in terms of “paranoia” (Sedgwick 2003, 126). In a critical or paranoid tracing, we might say, things “line up with each other so neatly ... and the monolith so created is a thing one can come to view with unhappy eyes” (Sedgwick 1993, 5). This is what I aim to do in my own tracing. I will seek to outline some of the multiple ways in which my interviewees, and the wider policy discourses they participate in, are complicit in a hegemonic formation of economy, society, and environment that holds us in an “unhappy,” paralyzing, and de-politicizing grip.

There is, of course, a crucial qualification required for such a move. I am *not* aiming to show that the lining-up of a hegemonic “monolith” is the only story currently or potentially unfolding. Tracing, in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's broader “pragmatics,” is a situated, strategic moment. “It is a question of method,” they write: “*the tracing should always be put back on the map*” (1987, 13, emphasis in original). The figure of the “map” is crucially distinct from the tracing, not a reproduction of “the same,” but an invitation to experiment with new connections. Unlike the tracing, the map is “entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. ... it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 12). Tracing alone is anti-experimental and closes upon a singular reality; tracing when “put back on the map” (precisely what the next two movements aim to do) is a particular way of taking note of

patterns that have been performatively constituted and into which we are—and might continue to be—enrolled. It does not purport to reveal a conspiracy of total and inevitable co-optation, but rather seeks to generate a *prophylactic* against such a dynamic. Tracing, with map in hand, is a strategy for recognizing the hegemonic highway onto which we might be (perhaps inadvertently) directed so that we can, in fact, be freed to *avoid* it and experiment with other routes of travel, perhaps even moving toward other destinations.

In concrete methodological terms, tracing involves the strategic construction (or reproduction) of a set of “major molarities,” that is, categories that aggregate multiplicities into unities and render differences into variations of the same (see chapter 1). I will, therefore, produce what may sometimes read like a “typical” critical analysis of the hegemonic formation of economy, society, and environment. Drawing primarily from interviews, I will focus on a variety of ways in which this hegemonic trio is composed via iterative material-semiotic practices across seemingly-conflictual fields: how, for example, certain “economic” articulations are implicated in composing a particular “environment,” and vice versa. I will also explore some of the ways in which these hegemonic categories function to obscure their own contingent (and vulnerable) production, and elaborate on the kinds of ethical and political closures effectuated by their continual articulation.

I follow, here, an important shift that has been made in some domains of social theory, moving from a focus on an analysis of categories as substantive (or constantive) *nouns* to engaging them as *verbs*. In the domain of economy, Çaliskan and Callon (2009; 2010) have called for a move from examining “the economy” to tracing *economization*, “the processes through which behaviors, organizations, institutions and, more generally, objects are constituted as being ‘economic’” (2010,

2). Similarly, we might shift from an emphasis on society to one on *socialization* (e.g., N. Rose 1999; N. Rose and Miller 2008; Higgins and Larner 2010), and from the environment to *environmentalization* (Luke 1995; e.g., 1997).<sup>27</sup> In each case, one seeks to trace processes of material-semiotic ontogenesis: the making of worlds, the composition of particular—and in this case, *hegemonic*—modes of reality. Foucault calls this “genealogy” (1984; and see Koopman 2013).<sup>28</sup>

The crucial point of such tracing is, of course, not simply to write a history, and certainly not to settle for the inevitability of that which has been traced. Rather, it is to become sensitive to hegemonic assemblages as processes of ethico-political (en)closure and violence, to render them problematic in new ways, and thus, in Michel Callon's terms, to “produce the conditions in which new emerging forces are offered the possibility of becoming stronger [and] to limit the grip of established forces” (2005, 18). It is an essential movement in a wider transformative project. To simply seek spaces for alternative creation or “lines of flight” *without* a critical tracing is to risk losing a critical vigilance against the dangers of “capture” that haunt processes of (potential) transformation (Pignarre and Stengers 2011). To *stop* at tracing, however, is no less dangerous, for here we risk performatively reinforcing that which we aspire to challenge or overcome (Gibson-Graham 2006b).

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27 Neither “socialization” nor “environmentalization” are widely developed as conceptual terms in the way that Çaliskan and Callon propose economization. In the case of “socialization,” this is likely due to the very different way in which the term has been used in sociology to refer to processes of assimilation or integration into a particular social milieu (see, for example Parsons and Bales 1956; Handel 2006; Grusec and Hastings 2008). A number of scholars have effectively pursued a process-oriented research program around “society” and “the social” under different terms (see N. Rose 1999; N. Rose and Miller 2008; Helliwell and Hindess 1999; Higgins and Larner 2010). In the case of “environmentalization,” an approach has arisen in rural sociology that uses the term to trace ways in which particular forms of environmental consciousness, discourse, and politics move through social spaces and influence the shape of various struggles (see Buttel 1992; Axseldrad 2010). Timothy Luke's work on “environmentality,” including a brief mention of a notion of environmentalization, points toward this alternative direction for performative inquiry around “the environment” (Luke 1995; 1997; see also Macnaghten and Urry 1998).

28 I will return to these analyses of what might be called “x-ization” in chapter 7, where my concept of “ecopoiesis” will enable a critical engagement with their limits.

Tracing is, indeed, a perilous affair by which one must come all-too-close to that which one seeks to undo, perhaps even strengthening “the enemy” in the process. I will return to this problem in chapter 4.

### *Decomposing*

How does one put tracing “back on the map”? A crucial strategy is that of destabilization or decomposition, the work of Part III of this thesis (chapters 5 and 6). If tracing has rendered a picture of a powerful hegemonic assemblage capable of subsuming and co-opting all that it touches, then decomposition unravels this picture. For Deleuze and Guattari, an assemblage is not only a stabilization or “territorialization” of heterogeneous elements; it is also characterized by the multiple ways in which it is continually coming *undone*. “The assemblage,” they write, “has both territorial sides ... which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away” (1987, 88). This “carrying away” is what I have already referred to in terms of “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 9), trajectories of escape beyond the stabilization of a given assemblage. This is to say that every hegemonic formation is continually coming unraveled, failing to capture or control all of the elements it purports to include, bursting at the seams with multiplicities moving in new directions that might tear it apart. We might also return to the image of the “zombie categories” presented in chapter 1: if zombies are animated by their very resistance to the death that they already embody, then decomposition in its most literal and corporeal sense is the trajectory of their undoing. The zombie fights decomposition and yet becomes it. The struggle against zombies (and zombie categories) is an alignment with the forces of *compost*

—worms, bacteria, fungi, weather, and “mess” of all kinds (Law 2004) that take apart assemblages and carry them away to become something different.

The work of decomposing can be called by many names and expressed in a number of different registers. It is akin, for example, to Derridean “deconstruction” in that it involves reading for the proliferation of meanings and relations that the hegemonic formation excludes yet nonetheless depends upon for its stability (Derrida 1982; 1998; 2001; Caputo and Derrida 1996). It is also quite close to J.K. Gibson-Graham's practice of “reading for difference rather than dominance” (2006b, xxxii), enacted so effectively in her articulation of the many ways in which capitalist hegemony fails to fully subsume a landscape of diverse livelihood practices (Gibson-Graham 2006b; 2008; and see Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013).

My readings of these approaches prepared me, prior to setting out on this research project, with something like a hypothesis: the complexities of on-the-ground practice in Maine are likely to escape not only the particular, *hegemonic* articulations of economy, society and environment (in the form, for example, of “economic alternatives”) but also the very categories themselves. Unravelings will proliferate, and may not be easily (if at all) recaptured. I could say, then, that my fieldwork “confirms” this hypothesis, and that this is what Part III will demonstrate. But it is impossible to separate my interventions with interviewees from the lines of flight that might otherwise already be present in their practices. This is the nature of “plugging in” and diffracting, and it is their very purpose. The decompositions that I will describe are emergent from the research assemblage itself, and this beckons toward the possibility that *other* articulations and assemblages beyond this thesis project might also generate decompositions—perhaps more radical and wild.



“Possibilities multiply along with uncertainties,” writes Gibson-Graham (2006b, xxxii), and they also multiply along with proliferations of hegemonic undoing.

The questions I ask of my interviews and other encounters in this movement of decomposition include the following: What other articulations of economy, society and environment are at play alongside the hegemonic configuration? What doesn't fit into “common sense” notions of economy, society and environment? Where do the categories themselves—in any form—begin to come undone? In what different directions do these undoings point? In what ways can certain lines of flight, seeping or bursting from the cracks of a “sutured” hegemony that can never be complete (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 111), be followed, amplified and strengthened in directions that might open toward new possibilities for collective politics and the composition of shared life on a volatile planet?

With such moves, I am in part following—and *pushing*—the unraveling that I described in chapter 1 with regard to the broad, historical destabilization of the core ontological distinctions that economy, society, and environment have conventionally rested upon. But it is not just any collapse of traditional distinctions that I am interested in, and not just any pathway toward articulating new ways of imagining and organizing our forms of life. The work of Nordhaus and Shellenberger, for example, is an explicit embrace of the collapse of a nature/culture distinction, a call for anti-essentialist politics beyond conventional articulations, and a celebration of a pragmatic “metaphysics of becoming” (2007, 219). Yet the lines of flight these authors trace carry us right back into the heart of modernist hubris: a Promethean embrace of “human ambition, aspiration and power” (2007, 17), a renewed celebration of “the power of markets to achieve our social and environmental goals” (238), and a proud defiance of “limits” (2007, 212) in the name

of a new vision of progress led by “new high-tech businesses and the new creative class” (2007, 212). It is a particularly virulent strain of a corporate-driven “ecological modernization” (Hajer 1995; A. P. J. Mol and Sonnenfeld 2000; Gibbs 2002; Jänicke 2008; A. P. J. Mol, Sonnenfeld, and Spaargaren 2009), a deeply anthropocentric techno-liberalism in the dangerous form of a seeming-“break through” beyond the traps of conventional categories.<sup>29</sup>

In seeking lines of flight from economy, society, and environment, I am interested in articulating and strengthening action around a quite different set of commitments. Far from embracing the blurring of the nature/culture distinction as a permission slip for a reinvigorated humanist modernism or an ecologised capitalism, I seek to push it in directions that radically challenge the placement of the “human” at the center of value, action and agency, and that reinscribe the necessity or inevitability of capitalist development. In this sense, the ethical impulse of my work is located at the convergence of two key streams of contemporary radical thought: posthumanism and postdevelopment.<sup>30</sup> *Posthumanist* philosophies further develop threads of what I described as poststructuralism and “new materialism” in chapter 1, broadly aiming to reconceptualise the notion of the “human” (and accompanying notions of subjectivity, rationality, individuality,

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29 It is important to note that Nordhaus and Shellenberger are in no way interested in challenging a hegemonic articulation of “economy.” Despite their nod toward an anti-essentialist approach to markets, they are steadfast in their embrace of “economic” logics and necessities. Indeed, they are much more passionate about rethinking “nature” than “economy”: “Environmentalists like to emphasise the ways in which the economy depends on ecology, but they often miss the ways in which thinking ecologically depends on prospering economically” (2007, 6).

30 Both the terms “posthuman” and “postdevelopment” are highly contested. See, for example, Colebrook (2013) for a series of thoughtful critiques of the posthuman, and Pieterse (1998; 2000) for important critical engagements (if at times overly didactic and dismissive) with postdevelopment. I do not use these terms to embrace a particular “school,” but rather to indicate broad ethical commitments, questions, and struggles. These terms are collective “stammerings” (Deleuze and Parnet 1977, 34), each of which forms a kind of ethos of inquiry and engagement. I locate myself in comradely conversation with these movements of thought.

autonomy, etc.) in the context of multiplicity, becoming, and vital materiality (Braidotti 1994; 2006; 2013; Bennett 2010; Gross 1999; 2004; 2005; Coole and Frost 2010); to embrace an ethics of encounter, interdependence and negotiation among multiple actants, human and nonhuman (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009; D. B. Rose 2004; 2012; Haraway 2008); and to constitute a “rhizomic” politics of alliance and interspecies solidarity (Bingham and Hinchliffe 2008; Hinchliffe 2008; Wolfe 2003; Whatmore 1997; Haraway 2008; D. B. Rose 2012).<sup>31</sup> *Postdevelopment* emerges from a radical critique not only of processes of capitalist exploitation and colonisation, but of the power-laden material-discursive production of the very notions of “economy” and “development” themselves (Escobar 1992; 2000; 2012; Latouche 1993; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997; Sachs 1992; Ziai 2007). Like Escobar and other postdevelopment scholars, I am interested in seeking lines of flight not toward “development alternatives,” but rather toward “alternatives to development” (Escobar 2012, 215).

### *(Re)composing*

A decomposition and destabilization of hegemony may open up new possibilities, but if these possibilities are to become more than just fleeting moments, they must be organized and connected. This is where my project moves

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31 There are many varieties of posthumanism. I am explicitly *not* referring here to forms of posthumanism which can be summed as “the same world *minus humans*” (Colebrook 2013, 164), and where a now-dethroned humanity simply merges into a “single-system where all observations can be grounded on a single self- expressive living whole” (Colebrook 2013, 166). There is a crucial difference between a subsumption of humanity into a unified and systemic “ecology” and a complexification and displacement of sites of agency, value, and action relative to what were once understood as autonomous Cartesian “subjects” (see also Braidotti 2006). I am also not focused on notions of the posthuman that involve analyses of the role of computer technologies and “virtual reality” in decentring conventional notions of the human (e.g., Hayles 1999; Pepperell 2003).

from an emphasis on critiques and cracks to a head-on engagement with generative experimentation. Following John Law, I aim to “respond creatively to a world that is taken to be composed of an excess of generative forces and relations” (2004, 9). This is the stance from which Gibson-Graham asks key questions relative to her project of economic unsettling in *A Postcapitalist Politics*: “Out of the deconstruction and multiplication of economic identities a number of questions arise: What are the contours of the decision space that has been opened up? How might economic politics now be pursued? And what might an ethical practice of economy be?” (2006a, 79). The same kinds of questions must be asked with regard to the whole configuration of economy, society, and environment, and it is my interviewees, in fact, who raise them in various and powerful ways.

Having unsettled and opened a series of possible pathways for escape in Part III, then, I will follow these threads in Part IV to explore articulations of something *different* that might help to convene these selected lines of flight into more visible, potent, and durable forms. What articulations, I ask, might be capable of constituting a collective politics that can challenge and perhaps even replace the ongoing material-semiotic institution (however zombie-like) of the hegemonic trio? What articulations are already present, in some form, that might be adopted, amplified, altered, and further deployed? I share Gibson-Graham's contention that “a counterhegemonic discourse is required that can establish (some of the) contours of a shared political practice” (2006a, 81).

The (re)compositional dimensions of my project do, indeed, build on the work of Gibson-Graham and others in the Community Economies Collective (CEC) who have sought to articulate such a counterhegemonic politics in terms of “diverse community economies” (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003; Gibson-Graham 2006;

2008; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013; Healy and Graham 2009; Healy 2014; Hill 2011; 2014; Miller 2013; Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009). Healy effectively summarizes the core of this shared project:

What the ecological and economic crisis calls for is a different way of living in the world, new forms of self-understanding and collective recognition of human and planetary needs and above all new ways of practicing economic relationships, including human engagements with the natural world. In short, profoundly different projects are required, including academic ones, for those of us who desire to bring this other world more fully into being. (2014, 212)

This thesis pursues the core dimensions of Healy's call, but with a slight (and, I think, complimentary) twist. Because I am interested in calling into question the very category of “the economic” (along with the “social” and the “environmental”), my (re)compositional research experiments not with different “economic” articulations (diverse economy, community economy), but rather with alternatives to them. Indeed, I contend that the CEC's “rethinking economy” project, while using the term “economy,” has already effectively ruptured the boundaries of this category and rendered distinctions between the economic, the social, and the ecological impossible to sustain. For Cameron and Gibson-Graham, “the economy is emptied of any essential identity, logic, organizing principle or determinant” (2003, 152). It thus becomes little more than “an open-ended discursive construct made up of multiple constituents” (2003, 152), a language strategy, or “nodal point” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, xi) around which to constitute new forms of meaning and action. My experiment in (re)composition is to explore what might emerge if we were to leave this particular terminology, and its heavy discursive baggage, behind.<sup>32</sup> The concepts of “ecopoiesis” and “ecological livelihoods,” briefly described in the

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<sup>32</sup> Gibson-Graham do, in fact, explore this possibility in their preface to the second edition of *The End of Capitalism* (2006b). I discuss their perspective extensively in chapter 7.

introduction and elaborated in the final three chapters of the thesis, form the core of my experimental proposal for such a pathway beyond even “alternative” articulations of the hegemonic trio.

It is here, of course, that the edges of the project are definitively reached. Experimental (re)composition has profound limits when it remains in the confines of academic writing, for the heart of the experiment lies in whether new conceptual articulations can, in fact, generate alliances with forces beyond the text. A variety of crucial action research strategies have been developed and mobilized by activist-oriented scholars to simultaneously construct new discourses and extra-discursive alliances that might make these discourses “matter,” in both senses of the word (Cameron and Gibson 2001; 2005a; 2005b; Cameron, Gibson, and Hill 2014; Drummond and Themessl-Huber 2007; Hill 2014; Hwang 2013; St. Martin 2001; 2005; 2009). Such work, however, is beyond the scope of my research capacity for this thesis. I engage, instead, in what might be seen as preliminary sketch-work, the construction of a set of analyses and conceptualizations which will later be mobilized in engaged experiments, made vulnerable and transformed in and through direct encounters with practices of collective intervention. I view this thesis as only the rough beginnings of a wider action research project that I intend to pursue with others in Maine over the years to come.

## Part II

### Tracing Hegemonic Articulations





## Chapter 3

### Forces and Domains

The challenge of economic development, of preserving the beauty of both our environment and our way of life, is to protect and enhance the assets that support our economic base—healthy forests, clean beaches, energetic and responsible workers—and to cultivate the entrepreneurial imagination that finds new ways to turn our fundamental assets into something the rest of the world wants to buy. (Lawton 2008, 37)

#### Introduction: The Problem-Space of Plum Creek

Few public conflicts over economy and environment in Maine have been as heated, protracted, and extensively-deliberated as the struggle over the Plum Creek corporation's "concept plan" for an major resort and second home development on the shores of Moosehead Lake in central-northern Maine (Plum Creek Maine Timberlands LLC 2007).<sup>33</sup> A real estate investment trust based in Seattle, Washington, Plum Creek purchased 905,000 acres of Maine forest land from the South African paper company Sappi in 1998 (Fisher 1998). This land had been zoned for forestry by the region's Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC), and Plum Creek requested the rezoning of approximately 17,000 acres to enable their development of 975 single-family vacation residences and two high-amenity, shoreline luxury resorts comprising 1,050 total residential units. This plan raised serious concerns from environmentally-oriented groups around the state, as the

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<sup>33</sup> Plum Creek's initial proposal was made in April 2005 (Maine Land Use Regulation Commission 2005), but revised and elaborated in their 2007 "concept plan."

Moosehead area is one of the largest remaining undeveloped forestlands in the eastern United States and home to multiple threatened species including the Canada Lynx, Rusty Blackbird, Least Bittern, and Olive-Sided Flycatcher (Carley 2007). After nearly five years, three hundred hours of hearings (Sambides Jr. 2013), reams of testimony and cross-examination by twenty eight “intervenor” parties, multiple acts of anonymous sabotage and vandalism targeting Plum Creek (Bowley 2005a; 2005b), nonviolent civil disobedience (K. Miller 2009), and an appeal taken all the way to the Maine Supreme Court (K. Miller 2012), Plum Creek prevailed. All of this unfolded despite polls showing that Maine people opposed the plan nearly two-to-one (Critical Insights 2006).<sup>34</sup>

Plum Creek's proposed development is located in a region of the state “where economic growth significantly lags behind the rest of Maine” (Colgan 2007), and where poverty and unemployment rates are relatively higher than in the southern portion of the state (Cervone 2005; Acheson 2010). For those in favor of the plan, Plum Creek's proposed development was “an ideal balance of planned development and conservation that will help revitalize the area as a destination for nature-based tourism, and fulfill a demonstrated need for economic development” (Fichtner 2007, 1). For those opposed, it was a dangerous and poorly-aimed response to such a need, undermining the very ecotourist potentials it claimed to enhance and ultimately despoiling the lake that some have called the “crown jewel of Maine's North Woods” (Liliehalm, Irland, and Hagan 2010, 78).

Yet for all the heated debate and struggle, much of the conflict unfolded on—and, in fact, served to *affirm*—a distinctly-shared terrain. There was something

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<sup>34</sup> I participated in the Plum Creek rezoning process as a member of one of the intervener parties, the Native Forest Network. The brief analysis presented here, while reinforced by citations of written work as much as possible, is also significantly derived from my direct experience.

called “the environment,” and specific concerns that could be labeled “environmental,” which pertained to a nonhuman world of aesthetically-pleasing landscapes, a “heritage” (Didisheim and De Wan 2006) of “unspoiled” places (LaMarche n.d.), and exotic organisms inhabiting ecosystems in which (certain) humans could exercise “primitive recreation opportunities” (Spalding 2007). There was, on the other hand, an “economy,” and forces or demands designated as “economic.” Here, an undisputed need for increased numbers of jobs and “opportunities” for local people was positioned in a wider context of “economic forces” that affirmed regional subordination to inevitable competitive demands. Torn or pinched between these two domains were regional “communities,” constituted simultaneously as sites of organic unity and legitimacy whose “voice” was to be determinate in the deliberation process (Bowley 2007) and as sites of deficiency or lack—desperate collectivities with little choice but to accept the only viable option for economic salvation that was offered to them (e.g., Fish 2006). “Environment” and “community” were, indeed, expressed as important domains of value by parties on both sides of the Plum Creek conflict, but also widely shared was a sense that legitimate or politically-effective expressions of these values could only be articulated in quantitative *economic* terms—as numbers of jobs, volumes of monetary transactions, and the market valuations of recreation, open space, wilderness, and “ecosystem services” (Carter 2007). Within such a framing, whole worlds of possible contestation and creative intervention were rendered marginal, invisible, or non-viable.

The Plum Creek conflict can be seen as a clear illustration of what I refer to as a *hegemonic articulation* of the economic, the social, and the environmental in

Maine. Public contests between “jobs and environment,” or between “local communities and special interests” may appear to involve mortal combat between diametrically-opposed factions, but many of the combatants actually participate in tacitly constituting the shared terrain upon which their battles are then fought. It is this problematic space that I will engage in the current and following chapter. In what ways are the economic, the social, and the environmental, in fact, implicated in the very same formations of power? In what space have political struggles and debates become trapped such that key dimensions of contemporary life—capitalism, liberal government, and human exceptionalism, to name a few—now seem inevitable? How is it that attempts to escape this hegemony are often recaptured by it? Before engaging these questions in the second part of the chapter, I will first clarify some key terms and elaborate on the contours of my approach.

### **The Prism: Articulation, Assemblage, and Hegemony**

When asked directly about her view on the relations between economy, society, and environment, one interviewee (Carol, director of a state government social services office) proposed: “It’s a *prism*, and it depends on where you’re shining the light, what you’re going to talk about. It doesn’t make the prism any less whole” (interview 40). Carol’s intentions seemed oriented on showing that conventional distinctions are little more than analytical conveniences, invoked in particular contexts to expose differently-useful facets of an essential unity.<sup>35</sup> What I am interested in here, however, is not Carol’s concept of the triple relation but the

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35 I discussed this approach in chapter 1 relative to the suggestion by my interviewee Chad that the categories are “really arbitrary” (interview 8). See footnote 2 of that chapter.

figuration through which she engages it. How does *the prism* function in her statement? At first glance, it might appear that an essential unity of light (the “real world”) is diffracted into three differentiated bands (economy, society, and environment) depending on particular analytical needs. In fact, it is not the *light* which was or remains reliably “whole,” but the *prism itself*. Carol suggests here, perhaps inadvertently, a powerful image of *articulation*: a non-totalizable multiplicity (“white” light) is actualized as a particular set of differences through a refractive apparatus that itself does not contain or embody these distinctions. What might appear to us, observing the event, is a sense that white light is “really” made up of a set of distinct colors that the prism only reveals; yet it is the *assemblage* of light, prism, and observer that generates this distinction. The prism, we might say, is an *ontologizing device*, a machine that refracts assemblages of economy, society and environment into their particular concrete forms and then disappears as the very source of refraction. The prism, in this figurative sense, is an operation of material-semiotic power, the construction-in-action of a hegemonic articulation.<sup>36</sup>

I have used the terms “articulation,” “assemblage,” and “hegemony” throughout the previous two chapters, but further specification of their meaning and relation is at this point crucial. By “articulation,” I follow Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in referring to a complex process of world-making in which meaning and materiality are inextricably linked. Humans neither encounter a ready-made world nor fabricate one in our minds; rather, we come into existence as provisional, ever-changing expressions of a material-semiotic composition that precedes, exceeds, and also *involves* us (1987, 234). “Articulation” is a particularly powerful term

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<sup>36</sup> I will return to a detailed discussion of the prism again at the end of chapter 4, linking it with the Deleuze/Foucault’s notion of the “diagram” (Deleuze 1988).

because of its multiple valences: it refers to an effective speech act (in phonetics); to the capacity for speech itself (in literature and law); to a dynamic point of linkage between moving parts (in biology and engineering); to a point of conceptual connection (in social theory); to the simultaneous distinction and sequencing of serial elements (in music); and to the effectuation or actualization of an abstraction (in philosophy).<sup>37</sup> I intend this word to refer to all of these definitions at once, in variable combinations that cannot be determined outside of specific instances.

For Deleuze and Guattari, articulation is always a form of production and a process of “territorialization” (1987, 41), the stabilization of entities and identities. This understanding is closely related to (and is, in fact, a source for) the notion of the “actor-network” as developed and elaborated by Callon (1986; 1998a; 2007), Latour (1987; 2004a; 2005), Law (1992; 2004), and others. Entities in actor network theory are conceptualized not as discrete, self-contained positivities, but rather as convergences of multiple relations or “patterned networks of heterogeneous materials” (Law 1992, 381). Hence, as I described briefly in chapter 2, there is not simply a subject who speaks, and nor is there a language that speaks the subject, but rather there are myriad articulations—sometimes linguistic, sometimes not—out of which things such as subjects and words are more or less durably stabilized. “We shall say of a collective,” proposes Latour, referring to any kind of multiply-constituted entity, “that it is *more* or *less* articulated, in every sense of the word” (2004, 86).

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<sup>37</sup> These various definitions are drawn from the OED's entry for the noun-form of “articulation” (Oxford English Dictionary 2008a). The last definition listed here, of articulation as the making-real of an abstraction, is particularly resonant with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the assemblage as an actualization or effectuation of an “abstract machine,” where the term “abstract” does not refer to an ethereal idea or ideal but rather to a sense of not-yet-corporeal potentiality that is *virtually* real but not (yet) necessarily actual (1987, 252).

To speak of the articulation of an economy, a society, and an environment, then, is to refer to the provisional stabilization of particular assemblages through processes that include material enclosures and exclusions (De Angelis 2007), the construction of stable references and measurements (Latour 1987; 1999), the circulation of visual representations (Latour 1990), theoretical narratives and concepts (Callon 1998; MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu 2007), practices of habituation, enforcement, and obligation (Latour 2004; De Angelis 2007; Stengers 2010a; 2010b), and various modes of subjectification (Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991; Dean and Hindess 1998; Dean 2009; Rose 1999; Rose and Miller 2008; Walters 1994; 2000). Economy, society, and environment are, in fact, what some might call articulations of “governmentality” (Foucault 1991); that is, quasi-durable constructions of domains of life and their attendant subjects and objects in ways that enable political management, control, and resistance.

If articulation is the process of composing provisional stabilizations, then the “assemblage” is that which is stabilized. The movement between the two terms can be blurry and confusing, since one might speak of (for example) the environment as “an articulation,” or one might call it “an assemblage.” It is a matter of emphasis and focus. The assemblage is, in a crucial sense, *larger* than its articulations: it is made of them, composed by them, and also taken apart by them.<sup>38</sup> When speaking of particular *processes* of composition, stabilization, or connection in this thesis, I will refer to “articulations.” When speaking of an *entity* or “singularity” that has been composed, has achieved some degree of relative durability, and yet is at the same time continually coming-undone via lines of flight, I will use the term “assemblage.”

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38 And yet even this distinction is relative. An articulation that composes an assemblage is itself an assemblage of a different kind. Perhaps an articulation is always a process of active composition while an assemblage is a process of struggle and negotiation at the interface of multiple compositions and decompositions.

An assemblage can be called “hegemonic” when its stability has been provisionally secured, yet this provisionality is *obscured* in such a way so as to render the assemblage seemingly-inevitable or unavoidable to most people in a given place and time. “Such structuring procedures,” writes Escobar, “must be made invisible for the operation to be successful” (2012, 107). Indeed, as Hannah Arendt has shown in her theorization of violence as the weakness of power (1970, 56), hegemony may be strongest when it is articulated not as an overtly-coercive force but rather as an unquestioned given. This can be seen clearly in a comment by my interviewee, Chad (director of an economic development nonprofit), referring to the triple-circles of the *Maine Measures of Growth in Progress* report (figure 1, chapter 1): “This Venn diagram is the most over-used, incorrectly-used Venn diagram in the world. It drives me nuts. But I’ll tell you why we use it. It grabs people, *and they get it*” (interview 8, emphasis added).

What they “get” is simply an external reality in which these distinctions *matter* in both senses of the word. “Insofar as power operates successfully by constituting an object domain, a field of intelligibility, as a taken-for-granted ontology,” writes Judith Butler, “its material effects are taken as material data or primary givens. These material positivities appear *outside* discourse and power, as its incontestable referents, its transcendental signifieds” (1993, 34–35). Despite the profound contingency, historicity, and performative constitution of the economic, the social, and the environmental as assemblages, what *appears* in the world is a set of self-evident, substantialized problem domains: *an* economy, *a* community, *a* society, and *an* environment, about which we must ask crucial questions, to which (and from “within” which) we must respond, and which we may even attempt to alter through various forms of management or transformative intervention without



questioning the existence or stability of the domains themselves. The “prism,” that which performatively composes this whole “reality,” itself remains invisible. It is to the tracing of these “prismatic” domains in their most hegemonic contemporary forms in Maine that I will soon turn, following a brief methodological clarification.

### *Strategic Paranoia and Actually-Existing Hegemony*

As I described in chapter 2, tracing is a kind of strategic “paranoia” (Sedgwick 2003), a reading that purposefully avoids complexities and multiplicities which would threaten a sense of unity and complicity between and among various articulations. As a self-conscious strategy that recognizes the performative dangers of its work, the tracing I enact here is not intended to produce a singular and totalising account of how things “really” are in Maine, and therefore constitute an undefeatable monster whom we can resentfully love to hate (W. Brown 1999; Newman 2000; Gibson-Graham 2006a). And yet neither do I intend to enact what Gibson-Graham calls a “straw man” strategy (2006, 10), a purified, larger-than-life representation constituted solely for the purposes of more clearly articulating its alternative. I cannot merely say that things unfold “as if” economy, society, and environment constituted a powerful, pervasive, and interconnected assemblage in which our institutions and imaginations are gripped. Rather, I intend to invoke this image of a triple hegemonic formation—in which the economic, the social, and the environmental are all “in it together”—as a simultaneously *real* and *non-total* articulation in Maine. Indeed, I want to say that we are *actually* in the grip of a totalizing, hegemonic mega-assemblage, the material-semiotic power of which is substantial and cannot be vanquished with the wave of a performative-discursive

wand. At the very same time, this totalization is marked by constitutive failure, as Mainers are always already in the process of rupturing, exceeding, and escaping this articulation and enacting others. “Reality,” as I described relative to my interviewees in chapter 2, is multiplicity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Law 2004; Massey 2005).

Perhaps I can put this differently, relative to the work of Gibson-Graham. In *The End of Capitalism* (2006), she mobilized the figure of the straw man in order to argue that we have been gripped by the hegemonic formation of “capitalocentrism,” the understanding of all economic activity “primarily with reference to capitalism: as being fundamentally the same as (or modeled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations; as being opposite to capitalism; as being the complement of capitalism; as existing in capitalism's space or orbit” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 6). Heavily influenced at that point by Derridean deconstructive approaches that emphasized the linguistic dimensions of discourse, Gibson-Graham's capitalocentrism often appeared in *The End of Capitalism* as merely a problematic *representation* rather than a materially-enacted process.<sup>39</sup> In later work, increasingly influenced by more materialist readings of Foucault's notion of discourse as well as by actor network theory, capitalist hegemony begins to appear as a process that works on the level of affects, embodiments, landscapes, practices of material discipline and institution as well as language and representation (see, for example, her analysis of “regional subjection” in chapter 2 of Gibson-Graham 2006b).

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<sup>39</sup> The term “capitalocentrism,” as Gibson-Graham notes (2006, 6, fn. 11), is inspired by Luce Irigaray's concept of “phallogocentrism” which is, in turn, developed from Derrida's “logocentrism” (Grosz 1990).

Capitalocentrism must, therefore, be reformulated. It is not just a matter of representing the world *as if* capitalism were dominant, but rather a matter of a very real and continual process of capitalist “becoming-dominant,” an ongoing yet never-complete material-semiotic *colonization* (Neill 2001; De Angelis 2007; Lazzarato 2012) that *covers up* the impossibility of its own ultimate dominance. Economy, society, and environment, too, in this sense, are not just problematic representations of the world, and nor is their hegemony a matter of linguistic discourse only. They are articulations that are continually in the process of making the world over into their image—organizing actual lives, spaces, and desires—and they achieve hegemony to the extent that this process appears inevitable and even *complete*. This is precisely the way that Laclau and Mouffe (2001) view it: hegemony is the covering over of the impossibility of fully tying social field together, the rendering-inevitable of that which is, in fact, always already (potentially, at least) coming-undone.

Tracing, then, engages economy, society, and environment as real and non-total articulations, as assemblages that are both succeeding and failing all at once. In tracing successes, of course, one always runs the risk of feeding and affirming them by (ironically) adding another ally to their assemblage: one more reading that reminds us of their victory (on the powers of discursive performativity, see Butler 1997; Sedgwick 2003; Law and Urry 2004; Gibson-Graham 2006a; 2006b; 2008). And yet this is a danger that cannot be wholly avoided, since we are up against more than a linguistic production. How do we avoid a performative consolidation of the hegemony we oppose while also acknowledging its substantive grip on our bodies, desires, and imaginations? “Know thy enemy” is Sun Tzu's (1993) perilous gamble that I wish to pursue in this chapter, while recognizing that such knowledge

must be *composed* and not discovered (Latour 2010). Paranoia might become a strategy by which to identify dangers of capture and co-optation, and with which to cultivate a *critical care* that fortifies lines of flight that are already escaping the hegemonic formation of economy, society, and environment. Such a strategy can be figured in terms of Pignarre and Stengers' notion of the “counter-spell” (2011): To ward off the sorcery of the hegemonic formation and to effectively create safe spaces for the nurturing other kinds of magic, one must know the sorcerer one is up against. This means neither ignoring their power nor simply adopting it against them. Rather, it is a dance of distance and proximity that—in the case of tracing—might require coming dangerously close to the source, perhaps even grabbing a few hairs from the very nose of hegemony with which to weave a protective talisman.

### Tracing Hegemonic Articulations

How does a hegemonic articulation of the economic, the social and the environmental unfold in Maine? What work does the “prism” do, and to what ethico-political effects? What, indeed, is this “prism”? As I described in chapter 1, the process of hegemonic articulation involves the production of material-semiotic categories that are at once “molar” and “major,” subordinating differences to unity and constituting this unity as a form of rule or standard. In their hegemonic forms, they are ontologized, systematized, and hierarchized in ways that configure a particular problem-space in which ethical and political struggle unfolds. My task now is to further develop this argument in the context of Maine, engaging with the interviews I have conducted. I will proceed by refracting each of the terms into key forms that they take as hegemonic articulations: *forces* and *domains*.

## *Economy as Sovereign Force*

I begin where the pervasive, normative priority in Maine politics and policy seems to lie: To get serious in Maine, to say something of substance, weight, and authority, one must speak about the economy. This is the site of “Maine’s bottom line” (Lawton 2008), where matters of survival, material well-being, dignity, and the very future itself all appear to be at stake (O’Hara 2010). We are told by the authors of *Charting Maine’s Future: Making Headway*, that “Maine people are concerned, above all else, with jobs and the economy” (GrowSmart Maine 2012, 10). Some of the state’s most prominent environmental advocacy groups remind us that “today in Maine the economy is on everyone’s mind,” and frame environmental protection as a form of economic investment (Maine Conservation Voters Education Fund and Environmental Priorities Coalition 2010). The economy is “hard,” necessary, serious, and foundational; all else is “soft,” secondary, and dependent (see Nelson 2009). Dana Conners and Laurie Lachance, prominent economic development professionals in the state, make the order of priorities clear when they argue in one publication that early childhood education in Maine “is not *just* a social and moral imperative; *it is an economic imperative*” (in Cervone 2012, 1, emphasis mine).

From where does such an “imperative” come? The economy is articulated, first and foremost, as a *force* that lies beyond the realm of individual or even collective human agency. According to Frank, a department director in a large Maine charity organization, the economy is “an incredibly powerful thing, and yet it’s not... you know, it’s... relatively unbridled, right? So it doesn’t necessarily act for the *good* of anything. It’s just... it’s just this powerful force, right?” (interview 38). This force is, indeed, beyond our control: “Economic forces are gonna happen,” said

Owen, director of a statewide economic development organization, “and it's gonna go where its gonna go, and we can try to control it, but at the end of the day ... at some level it's gonna happen” (interview 2). For some, this force is envisioned as a vast, anonymous agency or *being*: “It just seems like it's a... a machine that just keeps on moving,” said Paul, a social worker (interview 35). “I get depressed,” said Elizabeth, a policy advocate for a major Maine environmental organization, “because I feel like there's an economic system that we're never going to *tame*, so to speak” (interview 21, emphasis mine). For others, the economy is like the weather: a non-agential power that sweeps over us from above or beyond. Former Maine Governor John Baldacci has spoken of “an economic and financial *ice storm*—unavoidable and unrelenting” (quoted in Mills 2004, emphasis mine). Dorothy, director of a regional public health initiative, described it like this: “When you talk economy, it's kind of like this big ball ... the vision I have is, you know, is ... lighting going through it or whatever [voice escalating, half-laughing, almost shouting], you know?!” (interview 30, inserts added).

The force of economy is often associated with a set of “laws” that appear as integral to the structure of reality itself.<sup>40</sup> “You *can't* contradict the laws of supply and demand. I mean, they operate. They *do* operate,” said Ben, an academic focused on sustainable regional development (interview 12). His work normally emphasizes the role of institutions in structuring the political landscape, yet when it comes to supply and demand dynamics, such analysis does not apply. In a surprisingly identical articulation, a conservative economic think-tank leader (normally antagonistic to Ben's approach) proclaimed confidently that “politicians think they

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<sup>40</sup> Portions of the argument that follows have been published in Miller (2014).

can repeal the law of supply and demand. It's never been violated. Economists have studied it for hundreds of years. It's a *law*" (Marvin, interview 7). Law, in this sense, stands for a force of sovereignty that lies outside the regime of legislation, an "exception" (Agamben 1998) to the rule of human institutions. The economy becomes "an antipolitical condition, a state of emergency that abrogates the very activities that constitute its purported legitimacy" (Smith 2011, xiv).

A crucial vehicle through which the sovereign law of the economy is articulated or expressed is *measurement*. A measure is not only a "discursive device that acts as a point of reference, a benchmark, a typical norm, a standard" (De Angelis 2007, 176), but also a performative device by which both an object and its index are brought into being as such (Barad 2003; Latour 1987; 1990; Rose 1999; Rose and Miller 2008). It is not that measurement, as a discursive intervention, fabricates "reality" out of thin air, but rather that it fixes a particular set of processes into a stable system of reference that enables new kinds of presence in the world as well as new forms of intervention (Latour 1987). Numbers, in particular, as Nikolas Rose describes, "redraw the boundaries between politics and objectivity by purporting to act as automatic technical mechanisms for making judgments, prioritizing problems, and allocating scarce resources" (1999, 198).

Once counted, things gain a particular kind of independence and apparent stability; that which is partially produced by measurement seems to be objectively represented *by* it. In Maine, as elsewhere, the economy's numbers function as an *index of force*, an "inscription" (Latour 1990, 7) that renders myriad "local" relations into a coherent "economic" dynamic. This is, in Joseph O'Connell's terms, "the creation of universality by the circulation of particulars" (1993). What is universalized in the case of the economy is, indeed, quite *particular*: Far from

measuring all livelihood activity, “economic” measurement is usually restricted to *monetary* flows and any relations of production or consumption that can be directly related to their magnitude. *Maine Measures of Growth In Focus* is a case in point, where non-monetary measures are developed only to the extent that their referents matter for Maine’s “competitiveness” (Maine Development Foundation 2013).

Bruno Latour (1987; 1990) describes a crucial movement that begins with the messy production of measurement through estimation, trial and error, the elimination of outliers, the navigation of peer standards and review, and the use of the variably-reliable technologies of mediation. At this stage, we can find Kathleen, a statistician working for the State of Maine, asking difficult questions:

How do you convey the fact that, yes, this number is sort of made up? I mean, it's based on a whole bunch of stuff we don' know for sure. ... And then [how do you] balance that with the fact that, yes, ... it does have value because we need to have something to look at and this is our best guess? (Interview 5)

Yet this uncertainty is translated into something that appears much more absolute, expressing a truth of the economic forces that lie beyond any subjective interpretation. Through the production and circulation of what Latour calls “inscription devices” (1990, 7)—graphs, charts, tables, reports, quotes, power point presentations and such—messy measurements are cleaned up, rendered stable, and inscribed into forms that can be transported across numerous domains of action. Measures are thus made into “objects which have the properties of being *mobile* but also *immutable*, *presentable*, *readable* and *combinable* with one another” (Latour 1990, 6). We move from Kathleen’s uncertainty to the one-stop statistical grid of the *Maine Economy at a Glance* website (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014, figure 8); the MaineBiz magazine’s visual economic summary by the same name (MaineBiz 2013, figure 9); the colorful charts of *Maine Measures of Growth In Focus*, (Maine



Development Foundation 2013); and the twice-annual prognostications of the Maine Consensus Economic Forecasting Commission (Clair et al. 2013). In each case, a whole array of measurements are assembled in semi-durable, context-free form and rendered into “objective” data sets, each indexing economic *force*.

Once inscribed and ontologized in such a way, there is no negotiating with the numbers and with the economy-as-force they participate in articulating. Right-wing governor Paul LePage and the progressive organization Opportunity Maine both agree that the economy “demands” particular policies and fiscal actions (LePage 2013; Ginn and Brown 2010). It “provides” us with the means of life (The Brookings Institution 2006, 8). It “requires” specific actions and adaptations (Governor’s Council on Maine’s Quality of Place 2007, 10). As Calvin, director of an economic policy think-tank, told me, “Most people can’t stay [in Maine], because the economy doesn’t allow them to” (interview 4, insert added). There is a powerful disciplinary force at work here, laying out a particular set of possibilities and punishing anyone who transgresses their bounds. “Businesses and jobs must adopt the ways of the new economy decisively or face extinction” (Maine Alliance and Maine Chamber of Commerce and Industry 1994, 6). Indeed, such “extinction” is inevitable, and the demands of a cut-throat economic reality call for “bold action” (The Brookings Institution 2006, 14), “courage and discipline” (O’Hara 2010, 1), and “tough decisions” (LePage 2014). “You know, in an economy, you have to make choices,” said Owen the economic development organization director, “You absolutely have to make choices. There are going to be winners and losers. That’s how economies work. There’s no saving everybody” (interview 2).

The conviction that Maine must follow an inviolable dictate from the economy manifests in a pervasive emphasis among economic development

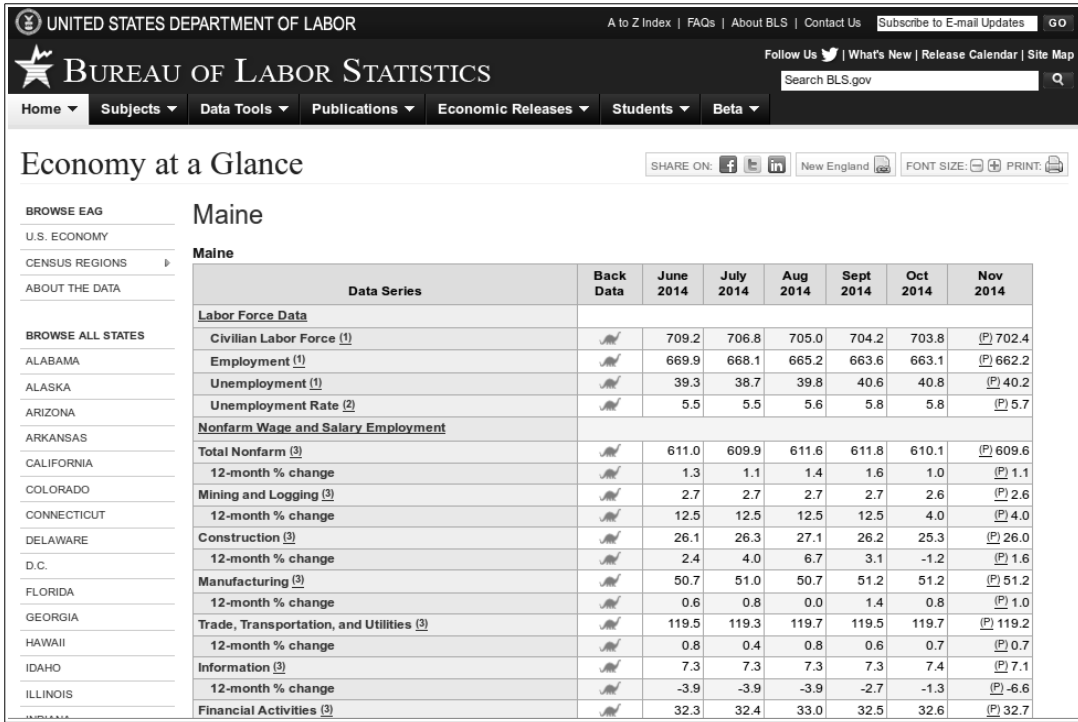


Figure 8. Maine Economy at a Glance web snapshot (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014).

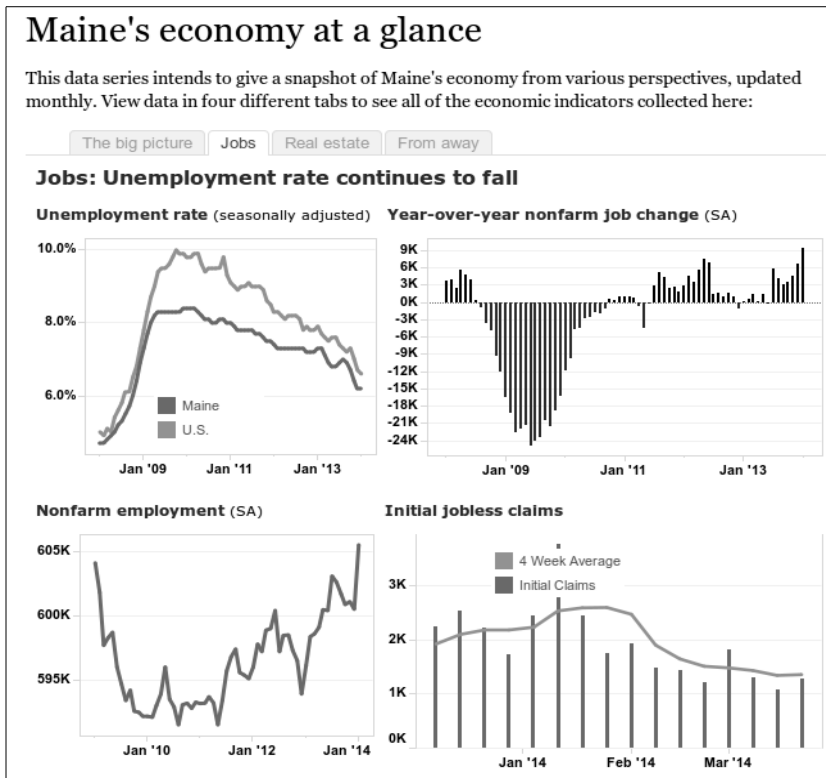


Figure 9. Maine's Economy at a Glance, MaineBiz website snapshot (MaineBiz 2013).

professionals (among others) on market competition. All strategies for improving human lives or environments in Maine must ultimately pass a crucial test: does this make our state or its private enterprises more competitive? Ostensibly cutting-edge approaches focused on “bottom-up” asset-based development, enhancing local capacity, and cultivating “quality of place”—approaches that might, in another frame, suggest a focus on endogenous development, regional sufficiency, and creative action to meet local needs—are all circumscribed by the necessity of competitive advantage. The only *assets* that count in the framework of Mobilize Maine, a statewide asset-based economic development initiative funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, are those that lend Maine an exclusive “competitive edge” over other regions (NADO Research Foundation, 2011). The only *innovation* that counts in Maine Department of Community and Economic Development's *Innovation Index* (2012) is that which can enhance commercial productivity or catalyze the development of new marketable products. Maine's *quality of place* is developed or preserved primarily in the name of attracting, as one interviewee put it, “young, talented, educated people...the hope for the future, for Maine” (Governor’s Council on Maine’s Quality of Place, 2007, 2008; Reilly and Renski, 2008).

Why competition? As I asked Arnold, director of a regional economic development authority, “Is this an optional game that we think we're obliged to play?” His reply was clear: “Well, I think we're obliged to play not because the game's being played, but because you need to *survive*.” (interview 10, vocal emphasis in original). We should be reminded here again of the material nature of articulation, for while the statistician Kathleen could propose to me that “a lot of what we talk about with the economy, well it is all just sort of concepts and it works

because everybody's bought in to this concept" (interview 5), this "buy in" is enforced by forms of material-semiotic institution that render these concepts not only durable but *obligatory*.<sup>41</sup> When the owner of an alternative energy business described to me that the economy "boils down to one's ability to *survive*, to produce a good or service or work product that results in some type of compensation so that you can eat, provide yourself with food, shelter and clothing" (interview 27), his linking of "survival" with "compensation" can be read as an acknowledgement of a very real dependency on a hegemonic economy that has been coercively established in Maine.

A long and ongoing history of enclosure, cultural transformation, and desire-production in the state (Taylor 1990; Judd 2000) and in its larger socio-geographical context within European colonialism (Marx 1992; Perelman 2000; De Angelis 2001; Meiksens-Wood 2002; Linebaugh 2008) has produced a situation in which Maine people *actually do* require money to secure core portions of their habitat needs, wage jobs to secure this money, competitive businesses to provide these jobs, and economic developers to help attract and retain these businesses (Illich 1981; 1996).<sup>42</sup> Few if any are wholly insulated from the addictive dynamics of market competition (Schaeff 2013) that so often punishes those who do not

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41 I use the term "institution" with a nod toward Foucault's notion of "institutionalization," which involves a whole array of material-semiotic practices of disciplinary normalisation and the rendering-durable and obligatory of various forms of behaviour (Foucault 1982, 792).

42 For indigenous Wabanaki people in Maine, this enclosure can be dated back to the time of invasion in the mid-17th century; for Mainers of European descent, it began with the undoing of subsistence-oriented homesteading by the forced rents imposed by the "great proprietor" land barons and their surveyors in the early to mid 19th century (Taylor 1990) and continued over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries with the progressive eclipse of remaining subsistence practices by regimes of wage labor (Judd 2000). Many contemporary Mainers do, in fact, still practice non-monetary, non-market, and non-capitalist forms of subsistence (Andrews 2014), but employment and access to money—and thus engagement with "the economy"—is nonetheless effectively obligatory for most of us.

adequately compete, nor from ongoing processes of “primitive accumulation” which unfold in the forms of debt, privatization, the elimination of public benefits, regressive taxation and other such practices (De Angelis 2001; 2007; Harvey 2003; Perelman 2000; Read 2002; Sassen 2010). As Sean, a prominent Maine conservation advocate stated bluntly: “We need to *survive*, and we survive in this society through capitalism. So money *does*, economy *does* rule” (interview 23).<sup>43</sup>

What emerges here is a stark picture: Far from having the freedom to determine their own future, Maine people must recognize that economic forces provide the dynamic, non-negotiable parameters within which any creative engagement with development must take place. Economic developers, social workers and advocates, and environmental activists all appear to be substantially obligated into the problem-space that “the economy” articulates. All are subjected to what Deleuze and Guattari call “an axiomatic of decoded flows” (1987, 457), a forcibly-produced process by which “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx and Engels 2012, 38; see also Berman 1983; Schumpeter 2003) in the addictive drive for capital accumulation that constitutes the life-force of “the economy” in its hegemonic (capitalist) form. With the economy restricted to a deterritorializing or “delocalizing” (Perroux 1950, 92) law-like force of aggregated competitive, monetized, market activity, Maine people can participate in economic life only as adaptive subjects—reacting, adjusting, or failing to do so.

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<sup>43</sup> We should not be too eager, however, to conclude that material-semiotic enclosure and the construction of real forms of dependency *determine* the articulation of the economy, render it inevitable, or relegate forms of inscription such as measurement into mere accessories of a “material base.” It is the articulation of measurements, boundaries and exclusions (which are themselves also quite “material”) *with* forms of institution such as enclosure that constitute the ongoing iteration of a hegemonic economy.

## *Economy as a Domain*

This overwhelming disciplinary force is not, however, the only form in which the economy is articulated. Simultaneously, as if in a desperate attempt to reign in or manage this force—to enact some form of agency in its presence—the economy is also constituted as a governable object, a *domain*. This is what François Perroux refers to as “geonomic space” (1950, 92), and what Timothy Mitchell describes as “the totality of monetarized exchanges within a defined space” (2002, 4). My interviewees would call it simply “the Maine economy.” As Kathleen described regarding her daily work as a government statistician:

People call me up and say, 'What's going on with Maine's economy?' and I have to ask them to clarify: Are you talking about Maine's GDP? Are you talking about Maine's employment? Are you talking about the unemployment rate? Are you talking about the number of businesses we have? ... Because usually they want numbers from me, and so they're asking for a very specific 'this is what I'm thinking about in terms of the economy,' so I have to find that from them.  
(interview 5)

The economy here is not a force or a deterritorializing flow, but rather names a specific, bounded space. “For a community, a geographic community to survive over the long term,” said Jane, director of a philanthropic organization, “it needs to have an *economy*. There needs to be jobs” (interview 39). Indeed, it is a particular economic *territorialization*, a spatialization which enables a set of identifications (“our” economy, “their” economy, the “Maine economy” or the “national economy”), and thus stabilizes this economy as a site for policy intervention.

In Mitchell's analysis, this economy-as-domain was not clearly articulated until the end of the 1930s with the advent of Keynesian macroeconomics and Simon Kuznets' construction of the first system of national accounts (1998; 2002). The

Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in particular, and its state-level equivalent (Gross State Product), functions to constitute a bounded political space as having “an economy.” As a core dimension of the system of national accounts, produced and maintained by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the GDP does not simply “take the pulse of the economy” (Landefeld, Seskin, and Fraumeni 2008), but rather works to constitute the very “body” in which such a pulse appears to flow.<sup>44</sup> A specific array of monetary transactions are tied to a particular bordered space and aggregated into a singular indicator whose continual rise becomes the crown measure of economic health, success, and well-being (Harvie et al. 2009). “You know, probably most people when they think about ‘the economy,’ they’re really meaning Gross Domestic Product,” said Kathleen (interview 5). Even if economists such as Eric, an academic regional analyst, know that the GDP and other measures are “just another measure; ... they’re not the economy” (interview 1), these inscription devices appear nonetheless as objective representations of a reality that is independent of them. The Maine economy, with all of the necessities and dependencies that it appears to entail, is thus constituted as a “bounded totality” (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 87) that one can encounter as an object, a site, a space, or even an “economic environment” (LeVert, Colgan, and Lawton 2007, 34).

In such a context, Maine remains only a small part within a larger whole to which it is subjected. The broader field of “geonomic” economization unfolds as the articulation of a structure of bounded, nested containers, each of which exerts asymmetrical force upon its subordinated contents—the global economy upon the national, the national upon the regional, and the regional upon the local (Gibson-

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<sup>44</sup> See Gibson-Graham (1995; 2006b) for an analysis of the relation between discourses of the body and “the economy.”

Graham, 2002). “Maine is not an island unto itself,” write Pease and Richard, “Its economic and social well-being are determined largely by national policies” (1983, 65). The economy-as-domain thus becomes a system of cascading determinations in which politicians, policy advocates, and other players seek to intervene at each level to maximize benefit (or at least the *appearance* of benefit) for their pertinent population (Rubin 1988). The articulation of a “Maine economy,” where this domain appears coextensive with the political boundaries of the state, thus renders it possible for Maine's economic development advocates to at least *speak* of the need to “create a focused strategy ... make the tough decisions and carry it out,” and to aspire to “re-create the engines of growth in Maine's economy” (O’Hara 2010, 1).

If the articulation of economy-as-force constitutes a dynamic of subordination and subjection, then the economy-as-domain can be seen as a moment of tenuous, provisional aspirations toward economic *mastery*.<sup>45</sup> In a widely-mobilized image, the economy becomes an engineering site, a machine, a series of “levers” or “gears” that can be manipulated to achieve various desired effects (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013, 3). Carol, who works for a government social service department, used such an image to describe the mechanisms by which conventional economic development interventions might generate positive outcomes for “social” practices:

Talking about formal economic development ... what those people who are economic developers would be focused in on... What they know is that *if they get that piece moving, then these other parts will also move*. It's sort of what's leading on this. So if they focus on what's traditional, and measurable, and cash-based, these other parts all also move too. (interview 40, emphasis added)

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45 For an important discussion of this dynamic relation between economic subordination and mastery, see Gibson-Graham (1995).



The discourse of leverage, of strategic intervention in the economic mechanism, is what enables the very *field* of “economic development” and fuels the image of a political infrastructure that can, with the right policies, “get the economy moving” (Centralmaine.com Editorial Board 2014). Dorothy, a community health worker, expressed the political hope associated with such a discourse:

I said, this last presidential election, 'I want a president that can make gas less than two bucks a gallon, that will give us three percent on our savings account, and either everyone has health insurance or no one has it.' If there was a president like that running who could promise those three things, I would vote for them and I think our economy would turn around. (interview 30)

Politicians build their electoral prospects on the promise this image of mastery suggests: that they—unlike their competitors—can harness and transform the economic field, “build a stronger economy and create jobs” (Michaud 2014).

The economy-as-domain is inseparable from the state. Coextensive with state boundaries, constituted in significant part by state-sponsored technologies of inscription, and presented as an object for state management, “the Maine economy” is as much a property of the *state* of Maine as it is of Maine's population. Mitchell outlines the mutually constitutive relation in these terms:

The idea of 'the economy' provided a mode of seeing and a way of organizing the world that could diagnose a country's fundamental condition, frame the terms of its public debate, picture its collective growth or decline, and propose remedies for its improvement, all in

terms of what seemed a legible series of measurements, goals, and comparisons. (2002, 272)

In this sense, the economy can be seen a stabilization of deterritorializing flows for the purpose of rendering them *governable* and thus constructing an apparently-reliable “hold” on economic life that can be mobilized for a variety of political purposes (Rose 1999; Rose and Miller 2008). Foucault has described such a scenario

in terms of the emergence of “liberal government,” no longer a state focused on a despotic rule but rather on the “management and organization of the conditions in which one can be free” (2010, 63–64). These conditions are, most fundamentally, the forces of the *market*.

The state is, therefore, not the master of the economy-as-domain, despite opportunistic rhetoric to the contrary (*x* politician will “turn this economy around”). Contemporary economic government is, in fact, another form of subordination to forces beyond human agency. Even Keynesianism, a key player in the origin of the economy-as-domain articulation (Mitchell 1998; 2002), is far from the “command and control” model that its critics might ascribe to it. It is, rather, a question of *how much* and *what kinds* of interventions a government should make in light of *the dynamics of the economy itself* (De Angelis 2007, 89). Keynes himself would argue that there has simply “been a fundamental misunderstanding of how ... the economy in which we live actually works” (Keynes 1936, 13). In Keynesianism as in neoliberalism, “the basic principle of the state's role, and so of the form of governmentality henceforth prescribed for it, [is] to respect these natural processes, or at any rate to take them into account, get them to work, or to work with them” (Foucault 2007a, 352).

On one hand, the economy-as-domain provides the state with a particular *mode of rule*, a context or vehicle through which to exert various forms of coercion, obligation and enticement upon a population in the name of its own well being (Foucault 2007a, 328). Neoliberalism only constitutes a more disguised form of such rule, in which coercion is “outsourced” to the market rather than located in a mediation between state intervention and market dynamics. On the other hand, this

“governmentality” (Foucault 2007a) on the part of the state can be seen as an ultimate *concession* to the rule of the economy-as-force. “Government,” writes Foucault relative to a lesson gleaned by the 17th century Physiocrats, “must know these [economic] mechanisms in their innermost and complex nature. Once it knows these mechanisms, it must, of course, undertake to respect them” (2010, 61). The engagement with various economic “levers” only provides mastery *relative* to a broader concession to economic forces. Indeed, the very image of *pulling levers* belies a structure of power: lever-pullers are rarely the inventors of the machine; while mobilising their positions of mechanical influence for various pragmatic purposes, they remain functionaries of the sovereignty of economic force.

### *The Social as a Domain, or the Aggregate Social*

The articulation of economy-as-domain is inseparable from the composition of a “society.” This is clear in genealogical terms, as we can trace a near-simultaneous and co-implicated emergence of the modern senses of “economic” and “social” domains from the mid-18th century (Poovey 1995; Foucault 2007a; 2010; Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991). It is also true in practical contemporary terms, as a particular, statistically-constituted form of the social stands as a nearly co-extensive “body” of the economy. This is to say that the aggregate population that both composes and is dependent on the economy is also the fundamental site of the social. What I will call, therefore, the *aggregate social* is articulated as a distinct sphere or domain of life through a whole host of “social” measures: population changes, age compositions, educational attainment, gender, race and ethnicity,

crime rates, health indexes, and more. It is often spoken of or presented as a coherent entity with characteristics, preferences, and even a certain agency: “Are we investing as a society enough in our education, in our health, in our creativity, and in our community?” asked Chad the economic development director (interview 8). “Mainers as a society value nature,” said Carl, an ecologist working for the state government (interview 18). For Kathleen the government statistician, whether we measure things in monetary terms “depends on whether we as a society want to be able to do ... dollar-value comparison[s]” (interview 5). In all of these cases, “society” is figured as an aggregate of “us,” the sum-total of Maine people taken as a coherent population.

Society and economy-as-domain are interdependent and often difficult to distinguish. Are demographic statistics “economic” or “social”? The size and composition of Maine's population is a key concern for many of the state's economic development professionals, as a rapidly-growing population of aging baby boomers and a sparse influx of young people appear to constitute a “demographic crisis” (Miltiades and Kaye 2003; Colgan 2006). “We want *more* people in the right *demographic*,” said Arnold, director of a regional development council, “yeah, and more jobs” (interview 10, vocal emphasis in original). While the population of Maine clearly appears as a constitutive characteristic of its “society,” this aggregate is at the same time fundamental to the economy. Indeed, demography is clearly an *economic* problem: “Maine's aging population threatens economic vitality,” says reporter Patty Wight (2013).

The health of Maine's society is, in fact, most often measured in terms of the state's economy, as if this economy constituted the circulatory system of a social

body, or as if society was the definitive substantialization of economic flows in a specific place. Oscar, the director of a regional planning agency, made the overlap and interdependence clear:

I think in a place like Maine you've gotten to the point where the society that you want to have—in terms of the number of homeless people, in terms of the number of poor people—the problem we have is that we can't afford to support the society, the social system, for rich and poor, on the money we make. States are just like people. I've got to produce something that someone else will buy ... We need more jobs, more innovation, to increase the level of economic activity so that we can afford more things that support our vision of our society as we imagine it rather than what it's like. (interview 13)

Society is, then, both *subject* and *object* of the economy (Foucault 2007, 105–106): it is the aggregate which enacts economic life as a population of active subjects, and it is that which the economy enacts or makes possible through material provision. Society needs economy, and economy is constituted by the population of a society. This is a reciprocal relation, with society and economy-as-domain mapped onto each other almost seamlessly.

The “society as body” metaphor runs into severe limits here, however, as it would seem to imply a reciprocity that is much more symmetrical than this relation, in fact, is in practice. Economy and society are articulated, to draw a term from economic anthropology, in an “asymmetrical reciprocity” (Orenstein 1980) in which economy most often appears as the master term. For even as the economy needs society as its matrix and its very justification for existence (“The economy is about people,” said Kathleen, interview 5), society's dependence on economy appears as a much more determinative and politically-potent articulation. “We *survive* in this society through capitalism” (Sean, interview 23). Issac, an economic development consultant, proposes that “The whole infrastructure of society is evaporating” in

some northern Maine communities, “because there aren't enough jobs” (interview 9). Or, as the sustainable development researcher, Ben, observes: “We've got a society that to some extent operates through the laws of supply and demand” (interview 12). The aggregate social, which could otherwise be seen to constitute a distinct and quasi-autonomous sphere (“society”) is constituted as a subordinate and dependent domain, desperately in need of the economy and economic development, and thus rendered into an instrumental *accessory* to the work of economization. Chad's strange (perhaps inadvertent, but nonetheless telling) inversion of “people” and “economy” makes this clear:

A critical piece within any economy is the people within that economy. So whatever they're doing, they are important ... they need to be functioning at the highest level they can, you know, their full potential. ... We use a measure that's pretty easy to get and commonly used, which is *productivity*, which means, you know, how much are you doing? And that is tied hard to, you know, a person's education and their training and experience and knowledge, their potential in life, which in turn is tied directly to their health. So you want people to be healthy, to live healthy lives, because they actually are more *productive*. (interview 8, vocal emphasis in original)

The economy, which Chad would agree is “about people,” is figured here as that to which people are ultimately in *service*. People, or populations, come to constitute sites of economic productivity, cogs in the wheel of growth, serving the demands of that which was ostensibly intended to serve them. This is a manifestation of Marx's notion of “alienation” *par excellence* (Marx 1964, 108; see also Mészáros 2006; Ollman 1977).

The social becomes economy's servant, a pool of assets, “social capital” to be built and invested (Maine Community Foundation 2001; 2006) in order to grow the economy upon which this social is, in turn, utterly dependent. “Community thrives and lives and dies based on the... strength of its economy,” said Jane (interview 39).

It is here that we can see how the crisis of an aging population becomes a threat to “economic vitality” rather than simply a “social” problem. Similarly, vital health statistics become “costs of healthcare” that contribute to the “business climate” (Maine Development Foundation 2013, 1), because “you want people to be healthy, to live healthy lives, because they actually are more productive” (Chad, interview 8). Early childhood education becomes an “investment” (Cervone 2012): “not just a social and moral imperative; [but] an economic imperative” (2012, 1). An exchange with Helen, a community development official, exemplified this pattern:

*EM:* I notice when you were talking about “opportunity,” it had that sense where community development is about enabling people to become better participants in the economy. Is that the sense you have about it? ...

*Helen:* Correct. That's basically my mindset. There's a number of different things that have to come into play to help someone be... um... a confident, productive member of society. And some of these basic community development things are helping to *support* that endeavor. (interview 37, emphasis added)

Community development is an accessory to economic development and economic measures come to constitute the very essence of social well-being. Meanwhile, the constitutive importance of all non-economic or non-economizable life processes and relations is eclipsed, and an asymmetrically-constituted “socio-economic complex” appears as the inevitable context for all human action.

### *The Environment as a Domain*

The analysis thus far has only involved *humans*, and a consideration of “the environment” in its hegemonic articulation will not, perhaps surprisingly, shift this focus. For despite a sense in which “environmental” issues are often associated with endangered species and images of undisturbed wilderness, there remains a

particular human subject at the center of conventional environmental politics (Evernden 1988; Luke 1995). Indeed, the human is often the *only* subject in such an articulation. If the aggregate social is ambiguously positioned between agency and subordination relative to the economy, the environment entails no such oscillation. It is, quite clearly, a domain of *objects*, inputs for particular human processes of production and consumption (De Angelis 2007, 67). If, as Owen the economic development director told me, “everyone in Maine is an environmentalist” (interview 2), this is because something called “the environment” has been widely articulated as little other than a collection of resources to be mined (carefully), a space for dumping and discharging the wastes of production, and a set of services to be rendered “sustainable” in their availability to human enjoyment and endless economic growth (Healey and Shaw 1994; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; De Angelis 2007; Kovel 2007).

The articulation of the Maine environment as a domain of resources or “an immense mine from which to endlessly extract the basic raw materials necessary to feed the processes of commodity production” (De Angelis 2007, 67), unfolds—as with economy and society—via multiple practices of measurement and mapping. Through geological and ecological surveys, ongoing inventories of forest tree composition, fishery health, wind energy potential, invasive plants and insects, fire danger, fragile ecosystems and endangered species, flood risk areas, soil nutrient levels, water and air quality, ozone levels, food dangers, and more, a “Maine environment” is ontologized as a domain of *things* to be used, managed, or avoided. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry—the latter self-described as “the State of Maine's support center for our many land-based, natural resource interests (Maine



DACF 2014)—are key institutions in this production. Not simply representational practices, their inscriptions constitute an entire set of material-semiotic relations in which ecological relations take on particular forms as sites of optimization, risk management, and “trade offs.” This is the production, as Timothy Luke describes, of the environment as “something to be managed by expert managerialists armed with coherent clusters of technical acumen and administrative practice” (1996, 3; see also Harvey 1996, 375). Moreover, this is a domain that can be economized and thus brought into the domain of economic governmentality—“managed” efficiently by market forces (Luke 1996, 4; Lemke 2002, 55).

If the environment is a bundle of natural resources to be conserved for a production paradigm oriented toward manufacturing tangible commodities, the growth of a “service economy” (Colgan 2004) in Maine along with the rise of discourses about the competitive demands of the “new economy” (The Brookings Institution 2006) have translated this instrumental articulation into the language of “amenities.” Here, accompanied by a rhetoric that purports to end the conflict between economy and environment, Maine’s natural resources and landscapes take on the role of providing an attractive backdrop for economic investment and population growth. “Prosperity,” said economic think-tank director Calvin, is “a function of protecting the character of the place” (interview 4). As the authors of *Charting Maine’s Future* describe, “Maine possesses a globally known ‘brand’ built in images of livable communities, stunning scenery, and great recreational opportunities” (The Brookings Institution 2006, 6). Ecological concerns appear in this report only as an awareness that “often-haphazard residential development is more and more *blurring those crisp scenes* as it impinges on forests, fields and waterfronts all around the state” (2006, 8 italics mine). In scholar-activist Raymond

Rogers' words, it appears that “environmental concerns are important so that economic development can continue” (1998, 75).

Such an articulation is not restricted to economic development professionals. In fact, we can find some of the strongest expressions of the “amenity” view among environmental advocates, where protection efforts often seem to be more about consumer advocacy for potential Maine settlers than about ecological concern.<sup>46</sup> As Carl, the government ecologist, described it:

I see the protection of the environment as such a strong selling point for the economy of Maine, and I always have. That's why I live here. That's why I think a lot of people retire here, or summer here. Because they like the environment in Maine. And so I think conservation, both land conservation and conservation of our resources—air, water, all those things—are tied to the economy of Maine probably more so than if you lived in... Philadelphia or southern California. (interview 18)

The Maine Environmental Priorities Coalition's key recent publication is called *Investing in Maine's Environment: A Trail Map to Prosperity* (2010), the very name of which indicates the extent to which “the environment” is bound up in “the economy.” One does not protect or restore the environment; one *invests* in it. The trail map takes us neither to health, fulfillment, connection, nor to the top of a wild mountain, but to *prosperity*. The instrumental framing of the report is crystal clear:

Maine's extraordinary environment forms the *backdrop* for who we are and what we value as individuals and as a state. Our jobs, our health, our leisure activities, our community values, and our identity as Maine people all have their roots in our beautiful environment. *When we work together to protect it, Maine people and Maine businesses can thrive.* (Maine Conservation Voters Education Fund and Environmental Priorities Coalition 2010, 2, emphasis added)

To protect “the environment” in Maine, we must protect investment opportunities. Why? Because as Stephen, a well-known Maine environmental advocate told me,

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<sup>46</sup> “The 'consumer' of the environment is viewed as though he or she is similar to the consumer of sweets or the consumer of Switzerland” (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 77).

“We're in competition with every other big beautiful place in the world” (interview 19). All that cannot be constituted in terms of market competition is thus rendered invisible, impossible to care for as part of a public contestation. Such an approach may be strategic, as environmental politics has often faced challenges in expressing a more “radical” stance in public (Dobson 1990, 20), but the instrumentalizing effect nonetheless remains (Plumwood 1993): “We have to think about the natural resources in a new way, and think about how to capitalize on conservation” (Sean, conservationist, interview 23).

Whether in the form of “sustainable” resource extraction, tourism, or the continual fabrication of “quality places” constructed in the imagined image of an outside investor's eco-fantasy, more-than-human lives, relations, and spaces are subjected to an ongoing process of socio-economic rule (Luke 1995; 1996; Rutherford 2007) and colonization (Fischer-Kowalski and Haberl 1998). Unlike a parallel dynamic within the domain of the aggregate social, all of this unfolds without an accompanying subjectification. In other words, nonhumans are articulated as *objects* of both society and economy, but never as *subjects* in relation to these domains. One might imagine a political slogan in this context: “*No subjection without subjectification!*”<sup>47</sup>

The objectification of the environment and its components generates a powerful oscillation. On one hand, this environment can be presented as synonymous with “nature” as a source of objective law—what Smith calls “ecological sovereignty” (2011). Environmental advocates can appeal to this notion in an attempt to close down political debate and present their ethical advocacy as a

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<sup>47</sup> Yet even this demand opens the question of whether various attempts in radical ecological philosophy to render “nature as a subject” (Katz 1997; Lo 1999; C. D. Stone 2010) are not still trapped within the very same regime of subjection, playing out a certain egalitarian redistribution of subjectivity *within* this still-hegemonic regime.

matter of fact rather than of value (Latour 1998; 2004a). David, a prominent Maine environmental activist, presented a classic discourse of this kind: “There's limits on a finite planet,” he said, “There's just too many people, *that's* the problem. ...We're like a cancer growth” (interview 24). He went on to describe an experiment done with undergraduate ecology students in which bacteria were isolated in a nutrient-rich petri dish.

These bacteria would just grow like crazy, and eventually they'd stop growing and the whole colony would die. It wasn't that they had completely consumed the medium which they were living off, but they died because of the toxicity of their waste. I use that as an analogy, the planet being a petri plate and we're the bacteria.  
(interview 24)

The environment, as objective “nature” and its agents, thus functions to naturalize a particular political discourse of limits and population growth (for critiques of this articulation, see Luke 1994; Harvey 1996; 2001). A different narrative with similar effects (quite ironically) is mobilized by some advocates of economic development. Responding in our interview to a challenge regarding the necessity of competition, one private economic development consultant offered a common trope of “nature”:  
“Yeah, but you gotta compare yourself to something. We're an animal. We have to be better than others. We are an animal that says I want to be better than you. Everything is competition. It's just the nature of being an animal” (Harold, interview 6). Not only the economy, but the environment itself demands that we compete—or die.

On the other side of this oscillation, however, is a clear sense that “the environment”—like the aggregate social—is ultimately subordinated to the economy. One can thus appeal to a natural law (e.g., supply and demand) to pose an economic sovereignty over and above the domain of an environment figured as passive,

potentially-commodifiable resources or amenities. The notion of the “environmental Kuznets curve” (Grossman and Krueger 1995; World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) exemplifies an articulation in which the environment appears as *dependent* on economic development. Eric, the economist, summarized this concept:

You've got to take care of the base first, and the economy speaks to that ... The environment ... gets far more attention from wealthy places than poor places, and it gets far more attention in good times than bad times. It's related to the stresses on the hierarchy of needs. ... So, ironically, we have the economy growing and moving ahead in order for people to deal with the environmental changes. ... The economy gets more attention in times of stress, and it *needs* attention because it's the only way in which society as a whole is able to focus on some of the other things. It's a trade-off. (interview 1)

Despite any sense that one might have to the contrary, it is the *economy* and not the environment that constitutes “the base” in this articulation, and only (capitalist, market-centered) development can save us from the very destruction that many have accused it of generating in the first place (e.g., Plumwood 1993; Harvey 1996; O'Connor 1998; J. McMurtry 1999; De Angelis 2007; Kovel 2007; Foster 2012). Such a view refuses to ask, of course, about the very composition of “the environment” that low-income people are refusing to care about in the face of “economic” imperatives. Could it be that this very concept—this material-semiotic articulation of the environment as an instrumentalized domain of objects and amenities always already produced as an adjunct to the economy—is precisely what generates the eclipse of the ecological and sustains the seeming necessity of economic development as a first priority?

Stepping back for a moment, we can reflect on a deeper dimension of the articulation of “the environment” as a domain of either resources or amenities. This very concept assures a focus on particular *humans* attempting to secure the status

quo of their ways of life in particular places. The verb “to environ,” as Timothy Luke notes, means “to encircle, encompass, envelop, or enclose. It is the physical activity of surrounding, circumscribing, or ringing around something” (1995, 64). This implies, then, that *something* is always encircled, something is always at the center of this enclosure. “An environment,” writes Tim Ingold, “exists only *in relation* to the being whose environment it is ... the environment is reality *for* the organism in question” (2009, 143). In the case of “the environment” as conventionally construed, it is clear that *particular human beings* and their livelihoods are at the center. The environment only appears as such, and certainly as valuable, to the extent that it supports the activities, visions, and narratives of these specific humans. Which humans? Those who are properly assimilated and subjected to a hegemonic articulation of the triple categorization: individualized, competitive, “responsible” colonizers; historically speaking, Western, white, wealthy men (Argyrou 2005).

The classic critique of “environmental” politics as a domain for privileged subjects seeking recreation and respite while remaining indifferent to core issues of social justice is not off the mark (Guha 1989; Cronon 1996; Di Chiro 1996; White 1996; van Wyck 1997; Cole and Sheila 2001; Sandler and Pezzullo 2007). It has rarely, however, been specified clearly enough: “The environment” *itself* names the *topography* of modern, settler-colonial, economistic anthropocentrism. In other words, it is not simply the case that “the environment” has been the concern of those who are rewarded by the hegemonic articulation, but also that the very construction of this environment is always already bound up in these relations of power. Of *course* one might end up asking: “Are you and environmentalist, or do you work for a living?” (White 1996). The subject that “the environment” has surrounded (and thus been constituted by) has been—and often continues to be—the

tacitly gendered, classed, racialized (white) “universal” subject that so many critical theorists have worked to expose (e.g., Beauvoir 2012; Da Silva 2007; Derrida 2001; 1992; Haraway 1991; Irigaray 1985; Olson 2004; Plumwood 1993).





## Chapter 4

# Outsides and the Diagram of Power

Have you drove through Princeton and Dartmouth [Maine]? I have. It's freakin' abject poverty there. Those people need *jobs*. I mean, it's not even a question! (Owen, economic developer, interview 1)

### Introduction

I have focused in chapter 3 on ways in which economy, society, and environment are articulated as particular kinds of interrelated domains, all subjected to an economic force that sustains and confronts them as if from beyond. I have focused, that is, on what is overtly included within a set of bounded categories as their “positive” content. But there is more to the story than this, in two senses that this chapter will describe.

First, every stable assemblage is constituted as much by what is *not* overtly included within its domain as it is by that which we might easily identify as belonging to it. Assemblages are always coming undone, yes; and hegemony is never complete. But a truly powerful hegemonic formation will generate the capacity to at least partially capture, transform, and draw upon that which it excludes and which flees from it. The first portion of the chapter will trace some of the “outsides” of the hegemonic assemblage of economy, society, and environment.

With this analysis in hand, it will then be possible to step back and consider another, more complex and necessarily abstract, “invisible” dimension of the assemblage. Here, the figuration of the *prism* will return, and I will connect it with

Deleuze's notion, drawn from Foucault, of the “diagram of power” (Deleuze 1988). This is a set of virtual relations that constitute the very space of possibility within which economy, society, and environment can emerge as actualities. The concept of the prism/diagram allows me to return to the brief analysis of the Nature/Culture binary in chapter 1 and place it in a wider, critical analytical context. The various actualizations of the hegemonic trio play out—or, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms “effectuate”(1987, 71)—not only a Nature/Culture distinction, but a dynamic between Capital and State as well as a teleological movement of Development.<sup>48</sup>

### **Outsides: Exclusion and Capture**

#### *Enclosures*

As I have alluded to in chapter 3, the articulation of the hegemonic trio can be understood as a historical and ongoing process of *enclosure*. I use this term here in two distinct but related senses, referring not only to processes of privatization and deprivation that “increase people's dependence on capitalist markets for the reproduction of their livelihoods” (De Angelis 2007, 133), but also to a much broader sense in which assemblages are constituted through processes that draw boundaries, ossify relations, enforce dependencies, and produce exclusions that these assemblages are, in turn, dependent upon. To produce “the economy,” for example, a line must be drawn at both material and conceptual levels: this is what *counts*, this is what can and should be *valued*, this is what must now be done in order to survive, since the economy itself is a hegemonic capture of the means of

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<sup>48</sup> I will explain in the latter portion of this chapter why I choose to capitalize these particular terms.

life. Economic enclosures have variously involved the forced separation of people from access to direct means of subsistence, the degradation of the means of subsistence, and a subsequent construction of particular “economic” spaces and practices through which livelihoods must be produced (the “workplace,” the “job,” the “enterprise,” the “market”), often accompanied and reinforced by the “conceptual enclosures” (Hyde 2010, 215) we can associate with the discipline of economics, rendering these spaces intelligible, stable and legitimate. As Çaliskan and Callon proclaim: “No economization without either economics or the institutional assemblages that act as socio-cognitive prostheses to ensure the coordination of agents” (2010, 22). “Coordination” here should be taken as a depoliticized euphemism for a dynamic much like Marx's articulation of “free labor” (1992, 272) that only emerges from myriad forms of coercion and enforced obligation.

Though the concept of enclosure has been predominately applied to the domain of economy, it is crucial to see this process as constitutive of the social and the environmental as well. The composition of a “society” is enacted first and foremost through the articulation of boundaries that delimit its legitimate membership. Who counts or matters as part of a given social domain? The politics of undocumented immigration in Maine is a case in point. In June 2014, Maine governor Paul LePage issued an executive order threatening to cut funding for state municipalities that provide general assistance for undocumented immigrants. In his radio announcement, he stated that “illegal aliens who choose to live in Maine are not our most vulnerable citizens. We need to take care of Mainers first. I think most Mainers would agree” (LePage 2014). With the term “illegal aliens,” he was referring to a group of people who have come to Maine as refugees from brutal violence in their home countries (Miller 2014), and as low-paid migrant workers who produce

\$137 million of the state's annual GDP measure (The Perryman Group 2008) by raking wild blueberries, planting trees, processing eggs, weaving Christmas wreaths, and harvesting apples, cauliflower, and broccoli (Doyle 2014). LePage's designation of "illegal" points toward the boundary-making of citizenship institutions, while his addition of "alien" addresses the very boundary of humanity itself. Maine "society" or "community" is stabilized and defined by this move, particularly when attached to material sanctions. On one side of the enclosure are "real Mainers" who *count*; on the other are those whose vulnerabilities can be discounted and dismissed. If any doubts remain about this example as one of enclosure, witness LePage's statement to a group of senior citizens a few months after his order: "If we can't build a fence high enough," he proposed, "we ought to go to China and see how they built a wall" (Gluckman 2014).

What of "the environment"? Is this not the ultimate non-enclosure, the very manifestation of the "outside"? In some sense, yes, as I will describe in chapter 6. But this form of outside, in its hegemonic version, is not the opposite of enclosure but rather a *product* of it. As I have argued in chapter 3, when articulators of the hegemonic assemblage speak of "the environment," they do not refer to a radical space of wildness that threatens the very stability of all that it escapes. Rather, the environment is the measured, bounded, and managed domain of the "source" and the "sink"—the recreation area, the mine, and the dump. One has only to consider, for example, the ways in which environmental concerns often take the form of creating and stewarding the delineated spaces known as "parks," "refuges," and "sanctuaries." Various versions of the Maine Woods National Park proposal (Kellett and St. Pierre 1996; Power 2001; Headwaters Economics 2013; Natural Resources Council of Maine 2014) are, in this regard, major sites of conflict as local people fear

(and experience) exclusion from the ability to continue long-time land use practices (for better or for worse) and to determine the long-term fate of their immediate habitat (Docherty 2000; Andrews 2014). As both William Cronon (1996) and Bruce Braun (Willems-Braun 1997; Braun 2002) have argued in different ways, such “environmental” spaces are not the last bastions of a non-cultural nature, but must be actively produced by a particular set of settler-colonial processes that articulate a division between environment and (certain versions of) humanity while speaking of “preservation.”<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, one is hard pressed to find *humans* in Maine's “environment” in the literature and rhetoric of many of Maine's environmental advocates except as potential despoilers to be guarded against, or as beneficiaries of the “second paycheck” (Whitelaw 1990), that is, “a quality of life above and beyond what is spent: access to beautiful natural areas, stable and safe communities, outdoor recreation opportunities and proximity to wildlife” (Maine Audubon Society 1996, 7). Humans “enjoy” an instrumentalized, romanticized, aestheticized—indeed *anesthetized*—environment that is *produced* as an outside. The Maine Natural Areas Program, for example, articulates Maine's environment in terms of a curated collection of “natural communities and ecosystems” (Gawler and Cutko 2010), none of which include humans despite most of Maine's landscape being constituted by human co-inhabitation with other species. *Natural Landscapes of Maine* does not list “parking lot edge mixed invasives” (including grasses, poison ivy, Japanese knotweed, ragweed, some aluminum cans, and a few cigarette butts) among their “assemblages of interacting plants and animals and their common environment”

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49 Similar critiques have been made of international conservation projects that displace local and native people in the name of environmental protection (e.g., Agrawal and Redford 2009; Corson 2011; Kelly 2011; Peluso and Lund 2011).

(Gawler and Cutko 2010, 8). As one interviewee, an ecologist, described in reference to a similar project, “if we were curators of a museum, we would want to have an example of each type of artifact that we could put in our museum and say, 'Look this is an example of  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ '” (interview 18). Who, then, has keys, we might ask, to the museum doors?

The enclosures associated with all three categories are barely separable, for it is the demarcation of “society” that enables “the economy” to have both a subject and an object, and this social boundary-drawing that also significantly shapes peoples' access to the enclosed means of subsistence. Meanwhile, the enclosure of “environmental” spaces enables a differentiation of landscapes such that some places may become more disposable than others, some more purified of apparent human influence than others, and a whole host of dynamics can play out by which certain humans straddling the margins of “the economy” may be pitted against those who are able to afford the seeming-luxury of “the environment” while never questioning the relations between their wealth, social exclusion, and the degradation of places that are not so privileged as to appear on the cover a glossy conservation brochure.

### *Externalities and Domesticated Outsides*

It is the nature of enclosure to constitute, and to be in turn constituted by, an *outside*. Michel Callon (1998b), following Goffman (1986), has referred to this process in terms of “framing and overflowing.” Transposing the economic concept of externalities into the key of sociology, he argues that entities such as “the

economy” are produced by a material-semiotic boundary-making that simultaneously constitutes an inside and an outside. The framing of action is essential for any negotiation, calculation, or decision, and it depends on both its *exclusion of* and *relation to* that which it has externalized. “Framing would be inexplicable,” writes Callon, “if there was not a network of connections with the outside world” (1998b, 249). On one hand, “all framing thus represents a violent effort to extricate the agents concerned from this network of interactions and push them onto a clearly demarcated 'stage' which has been specially prepared and fitted out” (Callon 1998b, 253). Yet on the other hand, such staging is impossible to fully isolate: “A wholly hermetic frame is a contradiction in terms because flows are always bidirectional, overflows simply being the inevitable corollary of the requisite links with the surrounding environment” (1998b, 255).

In the case of each hegemonic category, then, one can examine the overflows produced by the framing and trace their constitutive relations with that which they have been excluded from. What is essential for the framing of economy, society, and environment, yet overflows their boundaries? What forces and relations make each category's apparent stability possible while themselves never able to appear as *part of* the categories themselves? As Callon notes, not all such relations are necessarily exploitative or “outrageous” (1998, 246), since it is the very nature of order that it must exclude some elements of chaos. But the ease with which he dismisses the ethical perils of the framing/overflow relationship is problematic, as it risks rendering invisible substantive forms of constitutive violence associated with enclosure.<sup>50</sup> Callon thus sterilizes his theorization, rendering it into something that

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50 As Callon writes, “In itself, the existence of externalities is not in the least outrageous. That certain people should pay for others or profit from others without bearing the associated costs is not disgusting or disturbing. Such transfers are inevitable: after all, the laws of thermodynamics teach us that you cannot have order without paying the price of chaos” (1998, 246). In a very

would seem to stand as a merely neutral description of articulation processes rather than as an apparatus for a critical, ethical tracing of the operations and effects of hegemonic power. It is for this latter purpose that I am interested in mobilizing the framing/overflow perspective.<sup>51</sup>

What, then, are some of the constitutive overflows of “the economy” that must be traced in Maine? First, it is clear that the composition of an economy that appears to confront us as a force from beyond requires ongoing work of measurement, statistical collection, and analysis, much of which necessarily involves complex subjective (perhaps “social”?) judgments regarding the rendering-commensurable and measurable that which cannot ultimately be captured. As I described in chapter 3, one must move from the distinctly non-economic space from which the government statistician, Kathleen, can ask, “How do you convey the fact that, yes, this number is sort of made up?” (interview 5), to the definitive representation of economic laws to which the people of Maine must conform. The mess that produces the “hard numbers” (Owen, interview 2) and the “established facts” (Chad, interview 8) of the economy must be washed of their non-economic origins and presented as “immutable mobiles” (Latour 1990, 6, see chapter 3).

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abstract sense, perhaps, he is correct here. But move to avoid the “outrageous” dimensions of framing and overflowing is itself a framing move that pushes analyses of exploitation and violence to an “outside” that renders his theory safe for many of the economists and sociologists he is presumably seeking to address. In a larger sense, Callon's externalization here enables his theory to remain untainted by the specter of Marxist class analysis and other “radical” theorizations that might help to constitute outrage at the dynamics of framing and overflowing (see Callon's repudiation of core Marxian categories in Barry and Slater 2002).

51 One could also, of course, frame this approach in terms of Derridean deconstruction and the constitutive relation between the stabilization of a “text” and that which this stabilization necessarily excludes—and is therefore, in some crucial sense, constituted by and dependent upon (Derrida 1998; 2001). I choose Callon's terms partly because of the clarity with which they link to a notion of “enclosure,” but also because I seek to specify various modes of this inside/outside relationality, and Derrida's “constitutive outside” will play a conceptual role later in the chapter.



Second, the economy is able to stand as an independent and objective domain, de-linked from questions of ethics and politics, precisely because its articulation has pushed ethico-political dynamics out into the domain of the “social.” This is most clear in the neoclassical economic theory which informs much of Maine's economic development policy landscape, where the very force of “the economy” is constituted by the subjective preferences of consumers understood as “exogenous” (Bowles and Gintis 2000). If the “law of supply and demand,” celebrated in such certain terms by Ben and Marvin (interviews 12 and 7, cited in chapter 3), sometimes generates problematic effects, this is not a problem with the *economy* but one of *social preferences*. As Marvin, the economic policy think-tank director, stated starkly:

Why do some people like Van Gogh? I don't particularly care for his paintings. But people, some people are willing to spend hundreds of millions of dollars for it. It's not for me to say what you should value in life. Some people prefer saving insect species, others prefer to look at a Van Gogh. (interview 7)

Kathleen the government statistician, similarly, was able to deflect critiques of economic dominance over social and environmental concerns by blaming social preferences: “We, as Americans, tend to value work and money over just about everything else,” she said (interview 5), effectively rendering the coercive nature of this valuation (to the extent that it exists) invisible.

Third, while externalizing the details of normativity to the social, the assemblage of the economy in Maine nonetheless draws significant normative strength from its ability to stand as the singular source of subsistence, survival, and necessity. One cannot argue with economic imperatives because these are immediately seen as co-extensive with the imperatives of earthly sustenance itself. As the environmental advocate Sean stated forcefully, “We need to *survive*, and we

survive in this society through capitalism. So money *does*, economy *does* rule” (interview 23). At the very same time, however, a vast proportion of the relations that Maine people actually rely on for survival are utterly excluded from hegemonic articulations of “the economy.”<sup>52</sup> Over the course of my fieldwork, interviewees variously mentioned practices of hunting, fishing, trapping, foraging, home gardening, barter, gifting, sharing, parenting, elder care, housework, homesteading, informal care for land and waters, voluntary reduction of consumption needs, nonprofit business models, worker- and consumer-owned cooperatives, and the work of “ecosystem services” as some of the many ways that Maine people are sustained (see also St. Martin 2005a; 2005b; 2009; Robbins, Emery, and Rice 2008; Baumflek, Emery, and Ginger 2010; Snyder 2011; Andrews 2014; McCourt and Perkins 2014; Snyder and St. Martin 2015).

In very few cases did any of these activities or practices constitute legitimate “economic” activity upon which development efforts might be focused. For at least a few interviewees, in fact, dependence on such practices was seen as problematic, something to eradicate through *genuine* economic development. In a successful economy and society, said economic development network director Owen,

... all of those [non-market] things that people are using to survive, hopefully go away, or, [stick around] because they're fixed, meaning “I'm no longer hunting for food, I'm hunting because I like hunting” ... [We are] trying to get to the place where the other stuff doesn't *matter* as much. (interview 2, inserts added)

Paid work in competitive capitalist firms is thus established as the ultimate end-goal, the material-semiotic violence of its own enforced necessities rendered

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52 Numerous feminist economists and economic geographers have made a similar argument. See (Brandt 1995; Henderson 1995; Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999; Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003; Gibson-Graham 2006b; Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009).

invisible by a tacit discourse of progressive modernization (Escobar 2012).<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, the actual array of relations that Maine people require to survive are either relegated to the “social” and the “environmental,” or rendered effectively invisible with no clear place in the categories of the hegemonic assemblage.

These multiple non-economic sustenance relations and practices are in a position of constitutive exclusion not entirely unlike that of Marx's “reserve army of labor,” the population of unemployed people that capitalist markets produce by discarding and yet nonetheless rely upon (Marx 1992, 781). These are practices and people often relegated to the shadows and margins of the “social,” rendered into problematic sites for intervention while all the while remaining essential for the functioning of that which ignores, undermines, uses, drains, and disciplines them (Illich 1981; Collins and Gimenez 1990; De Angelis 2007; Federici 2012). We can see here, once again, the “asymmetrical reciprocity” (see chapter 3) enacted between the economic and the social.

What, then, of society's overflows? What is crucial for the framing of society yet is excluded from its domain? First and foremost, perhaps, is the economy itself. It is the dynamic of asymmetrical reciprocity which constitutes the social in its hegemonic form, as the “body” of the economy (Poovey 1995), yet this economy is nonetheless excluded from the boundaries of the society it pertains to. If there is something worth retaining in Karl Polanyi's (2001) much-debated notion of the “disembedding” of economy from society over the course of the 19th century, it is this: while the dynamics of framing and overflowing assure that such de-linking can never fully unfold (some have accused Polanyi of suggesting the contrary), there

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53 Adam Smith's (1982) mythological narrative of the movement from the primitive hunter to the pin factory employee is, apparently, alive and well in Maine.

has indeed been a process of articulation by which an economy-society assemblage has been produced. This assemblage is characterized by both a “disembedded” disjunction between the two domains and their simultaneous, total co-implication. In other words, there was no “society” that pre-existed a disembedding, no prior embedding which was violated, but there is rather a *single assemblage that comes into being as simultaneously separated and inextricably interdependent*. I break here with economic sociologies that would present the economy as inherently “social” (e.g., Polanyi 1992; Parsons and Smelser 1956; Granovetter 1985), and thus collapse the categories without interrogating their mutual constitution.

Apart from the externalization of the economic, society is also constituted by the ongoing exclusion of all of the relations, places, and human and nonhuman beings that render it possible yet never appear as viable, visible, or legitimate members of its domain. The example of undocumented immigrants in Maine is such a case, and this extends to other groups and relations as well. Maine's “society” depends on myriad relations that it simultaneously excludes, from the outsourcing of lumber production to the southern U.S. and South America that enables a reduction of in-state industrial forestry to sustain wood consumption habits (Berlik, Kittredge, and Foster 2002), to the widespread discursive exclusion of people “from away” (that is, from other states and nations) as fully-legitimate participants in public deliberations (Anderson 1997; Shuman 2007, 205). Perhaps most fundamentally, the social in Maine and elsewhere is constituted by the exclusion of the entire web of more-than-human relations that are the focus of ecology. Society is, indeed, the space of non-nature, the primordial *human* enclosure of civilization against the howling wilderness (Evernden 1992; Soper 1995; Wright 2010). Yet it is this very “wilderness” on which all that is social utterly depends.

What, then, must be excluded from “the environment” in order for it to appear as a coherent domain? One might see a pattern here: the environment is constituted, in a significant sense, by its exclusion of and simultaneous dependence on the social and the economic. The humans who write guidebooks such as *Natural Landscapes of Maine* cannot themselves appear as constituents of “the environment” they describe. Other humans who depend upon these “natural landscapes” for daily subsistence—collecting fiddlehead ferns (a common spring food in rural Maine), fishing, hunting, gathering medicinal herbs and materials for basket-making and wreath-weaving (Baumflek, Emery, and Ginger 2010)—can never appear in such guidebooks, either, for they are “social” interlopers in a space that is not theirs. On a wider scale, the complex market dynamics that shape and re-shape the forested ecological patchworks of northern Maine along with weather systems, insect populations, and soil microbes cannot count as “environmental” impacts, but must appear as external forces against which the environment must contend. Meanwhile, the often-unacknowledged backdrop to such articulations is the forcible removal and continued exclusion and erasure of indigenous people from these places that were once, and for some still are, a *home* rather than an “environment” (Braun 2002).<sup>54</sup>

All of these examples of overflowing that I have described are, quite clearly, of very different natures. There are many kinds of “outsides,” and many forms that enclosure and exclusion take. What I want to draw attention to at this point is the sense in which many of these “overflows” are not entirely excluded from the hegemonic articulation as whole, but are rather rendered into what I will call

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<sup>54</sup> Maine continues to be home to people of the Abenaki, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Micmac, and Maliseet nations.

“domesticated outsides.” These are outsides which overflow, but maintain clear relations with that which they are outside of. They “[put] the outside world in brackets ... but [do] not actually abolish all links with it” (Callon 1998, 249), and their recognition or even assimilation does not necessarily threaten the stability of the assemblage itself. In fact, their recognition and domestication in some form may be crucial to the ongoing maintenance of hegemony. An economic developer acknowledges, for example, the existence of non-market modes of sustenance, but renders them secondary (Owen, interview 2). A social worker recognizes the constitutive importance of sociality with nonhuman companion animals, but this remains a mere instrumental accessory to human-centered work (Dorothy, interview 30). An environmental scientist tells a story about meeting human subsistence gatherers on a trip into a “remote wilderness area,” but this is granted only the status of a quaint experience (Carl, interview 18).

Such overflows must, therefore, be distinguished from what Judith Butler, following Derrida (1982; 1998), refers to a “constitutive outside” (1993, 188).<sup>55</sup> This latter form of “outside” is that which cannot even appear as *intelligible* within a given symbolic-material order. It is “the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility” (Butler 1993, xi). The domesticated outside, on the other hand, is an externalization that can be named, mapped, and given a relation to that which has been enclosed. Domesticated outsides are representable within the hegemonic order, even as this representation does violence to their possible other (non-hegemonic) becomings. I intend this term “domesticated” to invoke a sense of the

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55 The term “constitutive outside” itself was coined by Derrida scholar Henry Staten (1986).

relative containment and taming of an otherwise potentially dangerous material-semiotic “wildness” or excess (Bataille 1985; 1991), and I also seek to make discursive connections with feminist critiques of the ways in which domestic labor constitutes a particular, exploited outside/inside relative to many modern, patriarchal assemblages (see, for example, Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa 1999; Federici 2012).

My naming of the domesticated outside, and my association of the various examples above with it, should not be taken as suggesting that clear lines can actually be drawn between the “domesticated” and the “wild,” and my critical tracing here is not intended to ultimately reinforce such distinctions. The line, in practice, is utterly blurred, and that which appears assimilable at one moment can threaten the coherence of an assemblage from its very heart at the next. It may be more useful, in this regard, to think of the domesticated outside as an ongoing *process* of domestication (as with capitalist colonization described at the outset of chapter 3) that never wholly succeeds. I will return to this point below in my discussion of attempts to assimilate the “abject outsides.”

### *Abject Outsides and Their Assimilation*

There are certain relations that lurk on the very edges of the domesticated outside. These are what Callon attempts to avoid in his refusal to be outraged, “disgusted” or “disturbed” by the dynamics of externalities (1998, 246), for they are often quite disturbing in multiple senses. These are, in fact, elements of a different kind of outside—one that is more complex and strange. It is an outside that is at once outside *and* inside, simultaneously located at the very limits of domesticable overflows and also within the very heart of enclosure itself as its *underside*. This is

where we find economic subjects who have failed to perform or have been rendered “redundant” or “surplus”; social subjects who have reached the limits of acceptable sociality and must become the objects of “social work”; environmental dynamics that soil and deface beautiful images of “wilderness”; and environmental subjects who render-monstrous the very distinction between subjects and objects that the environment is supposed to affirm. I will call this the “abject outside.”

My use of the term “abject” is intended to resonate in some degree with Julia Kristeva’s theorization of “the jettisoned object,” that which “lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the ... rules of the game” (1982, 2). The abject, in this sense, is neither fully object nor fully subject, positioned at the limits of acceptable boundaries and often appearing as the disgusting and disturbing *mess* that troubles and threatens the stability of the order from which it excluded. I am not, however, linking my notion of abjection to a whole psychoanalytic assemblage and reference to Kristeva should be taken as merely suggestive. I mobilize abjection here in the broad sense that it has been used in other realms of political theory, as the excluded surplus or excess which haunts the edges of that which has constituted it and which it, in turn, constitutes at the limits (see, for example, Corlett 1998; Nyers 2003; Endnotes 2013). As a site of violence which underwrites appearances of peace, the abject is painful to encounter and acknowledge. As the site of unruly transgression that shows a given assemblage to be rotten at its very core, the abject is dangerous. If an assemblage is to remain territorialized and hegemonic, the abject outside must either be eliminated (an impossible task) or assimilated.

The abject economic takes the form of people who are excluded from access to enclosed spaces, pushed to their very margins while still remaining in their grip, and who embody the failures of the economic itself while nonetheless appearing in



the hegemonic articulation as *personal* failures. This is the zone of existence beyond the “industrial reserve army” where people are no longer even able to appear as potential workers. Marx and Engels (1970) call this the “lumpenproletariat” (and see Thoburn 2001), William Corlett refers to it as the “surplus population” or simply “the Damned” (1998, 159), and Serge Latouche (1993) speaks of “development’s castaways.” Economic developers in Maine often use the abject economic as a justification for various policy interventions, as when Owen asked me, “Have you drove through Princeton and Dartmouth [Maine]? I have. It’s freakin’ abject poverty there. Those people need *jobs*” (interview 2). And yet those pushed into the abject economic do not always conform to the desires and demands of economic development. Some refuse to be “energetic and responsible workers” (Lawton 2008, 37) and forge other paths. As regional planner Oscar described,

You have people on the low end of the economic scale who like it just the way it is ... They’ve come up with a system in some fashion that involves wages, subsidies, and welfare and those sorts of things in order to maintain a lifestyle that they’re comfortable with. And many of them will juxtapose that economic situation with the fact that they can go out in the backyard and there’s nobody there and they can see the hills. (interview 13)

This is Oscar’s own story, of course, and peoples’ lived realities are often much more complex and problematic. The point is that the economic produces subjects that it cannot then fully assimilate and whose existence and trajectory challenge its core articulations. There is a good reason that Maine economist Chuck Lawton writes of “the social unrest inherent in our capitalist world” (2008, 41).

The reality of the abject economic often presents those located more firmly within the hegemonic articulation with a sense of repulsion, horror, or fear. It is this marginality and vulnerability that the economic is intended to overcome, and the

possibility of life on the “outside” is terrifying.<sup>56</sup> Hence the economic developer Owen's desire for people to move beyond dependence on hunting for their sustenance: he wants to move toward, in his words, “Yeah I like the taste of deer meat so I kill a deer once a year, but I'm not [going to], like, have anxiety over if I don't get the deer I don't know how I'm going to eat this winter” (interview 2). Who with access to the relative stabilities of “the economy” would not be averse to needing a successful hunt? What horror, we might think, to be dependent on local ecological relations, our own skill as hunters, and the health of the deer herd! And yet it was Owen who also told me that “economic forces are gonna happen, and it's gonna go where its gonna go, and we can try to control it, but at the end of the day ... it's gonna happen” (interview 2). To contrast the fear of dependency on a local ecology with the enthusiastic embrace of dependency on an anonymous economy is to see the strength of the hegemonic articulation and to touch something quite dangerous that the presence of the abject offers: the possibility of *other forms of life*.

This abject economic is, in some sense, also a key site of the abject *social*, since those who are excluded from the economy are also placed at the margins of a society that stands as that economy's “body.” This is precisely where “social work,” in its complicit hegemonic form, comes in as a form of assimilatory practice. “Social work is always trying to move something to the less fortunate,” said Fred, director of a Maine community development organization, “It's having impact for people that are in the lower tier of economics.... How do we get capital, resources, skills, various things to those folks?” (interview 34). This is not to say that redistribution is, in itself, problematic. Hegemonic complicity appears, rather, when the “social” is

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56 Joon-ho Bong's (2013) film *Snowpiercer* provides a powerful image of the oblivion that life on “the outside” seems to suggest, while also offering a glimpse of the slim chance for transformation that its embrace might offer. Thanks to Boone Shear for pointing me toward this film.

articulated in its abject form as the domain of all of those who have *failed* to become adequate economic subjects. As sociologists Marie Pellegrin-Rescia and Yair Levi describe:

There is an ongoing integration (to which center?) of populations that, classified by the category of imaginary completeness, are described in the negative as 'inactive', 'non-affiliated', 'miserable', subject of 'shame' to themselves and objects of 'pity', for they lack the 'control' over their situation and themselves. (2005, 5)

The abject social appears as a “gap” that needs to be filled, a problem that must be solved with economic development: “What we try to do is to identify what's missing, where the gaps are, and then try to fill those gaps with existing resources” (Dorothy, community health worker, interview 30); “We work to fill gaps in the marketplace” (Brent, community development finance specialist, interview 36); “The nonprofit sector comes in to fill the gap” (Fred, community development worker, interview 34).

We find, then, at sites of the abject social, an ongoing articulation of a host of “social problems,” failures of assimilation, normalization, or discipline (Foucault 2007a). As Robert Castel writes, “Marginality itself, instead of remaining unexplored or rebellious territory, can become an organized zone within the social, towards which those persons will be directed who are incapable of following more competitive pathways” (1991, 295). Multiple spaces of diverse livelihood practice—some quite problematic and some not—are thus transformed into the uniform measure of “poverty” in terms of *income* (Acheson 2007; 2010). People must be brought into the fold of proper economic life, rendered into “confident, productive members of society” (Helen, interview 37). For many social workers, economic developers and other agents of (liberal) government, such an articulation demands an emphasis on the movement of people into more and better forms of

“employment,” presumably in predominately private (capitalist) firms: “A lot of the things we’re talking about, you know,” said Frank, director of a social charity organization, like “living a healthier life, accumulation of assets, you know, and those types of things, come with employment. That’s really what it is. It’s a function of employment.” (interview 38). Nearly all of the “social” professionals I spoke to were oriented in some way toward the production of “opportunities.” This term itself functions, in fact, as a form of disciplinary subjection by which a whole host of responsibilities are conferred up the (possibly failed) economic subject who must now think of themselves as “entrepreneurs of the self” (N. Rose 1999, 142).

Social work, in this sense, can often function (in part, and with crucial exceptions) as an accessory to the process of hegemonic articulation, as institutional interventions seek continually to (re)make individuals and populations into “an engaged workforce that’s ready to do the jobs of the century” (Brenda, researcher for a social policy organization, interview 4). A whole host of disciplinary measures are deployed here, from incentive structures linked to food stamp benefits to mandatory home visits by social workers, all seeking to bring the abject back into the fold of society and economy, or at least to neutralize their threat as aberrant and potentially unruly subjects. This is not to say that all such practices are inherently and wholly problematic; indeed, many people depend on social workers and social benefits for key dimensions of life, and many of the people who do this work are heroic, well-intentioned, and sometimes life-saving. The point here is that the hegemonic articulation renders the line between solidarity and collective care, on one hand, and assimilatory discipline, on the other, quite blurry. The latter is, in fact, all-too-often justified by appeal to the former.

There is much more to the abject social than economic failure, of course, since this is the outside edge to which so many people, bodies, practices, ways of life, and forms of desire are forcibly pushed in the process of stabilizing a particular normative assemblage of society. It is not within the scope of my work here to trace these complex contours, and significant work has been done by others to trace the ways in which, for example, black and brown bodies (e.g., Scott 2010; Yancy 2008), transgendered bodies (e.g., Butler 1999; Cotten 2012; Elliot 2012; Enke 2012), and queer desires of myriad shapes (Butler 1999; 1993; Sedgwick 1990) have been rendered abject as a mode of white supremacist and heteronormative articulation. It is no coincidence that Paul LePage's so-called "aliens" are primarily immigrants from Latin America and Africa, and that as the "whitest" state in the U.S. (Koenig 2013), Maine has been a long-time site of violence and hostility toward people of color (see, for example, Thistle 2012; Woodard 2012). Economic abjection and social abjection intersect here, in the state where African Americans experience the highest relative rate of poverty in the nation (Ross and Sullivan 2014).

There is also a clear sense in which transgressive relations between humans and nonhuman animals also constitute key sites of social abjection (indeed, the very fact that this theme follows the previous paragraph alludes to a whole history of the "human" itself as a site of racist boundary-making). In my interviews, the social abjection of human-nonhuman relations was most often expressed via a sense of the ridiculousness of linking nonhumans with human categories and with forms of respect and desire associated with the social. I risked rendering my whole project suspect and was, in fact, met with awkward silence when I asked two different interviewees about whether we could also speak of "deer economies" or "dog economies" (interviews 16 and 22). When I asked Sandra, director of a regional

economic growth council, “If I were to get up and say, ‘we need to take nonhumans seriously in our thinking about this,’” she responded: “You’d be laughed right out of the ATV store, dear [puts on strong Maine accent], if you came up with that. They’d laugh you right out of the snowmobile shop!” (interview 3).

There is an *abject environment* as well, and it is constituted as all of the relations and beings that cannot be fully assimilated into the hegemonic articulation of environment yet nonetheless render it intelligible at its limits. Here we might think, in part, of particular inconveniences that mess up a pretty picture, as, for example, were introduced by one interviewee with regard to romantic environmental framings during the struggle against a proposed dam project on the Penobscot River in the mid-1980s. Matthew, an economic development consultant, described the Big Ambejackmockamus Falls (or “Big A”) battle:

That was saving a so-called “wilderness waterway,” which was not a wilderness waterway, but can be depicted as one. You know, you can position your camera in such a way that the logging road isn’t visible, that the power lines along it aren’t visible. You get away from the dams and away from the crowds of fishermen, and you do it at a time when the dust from the logging roads is not rolling over it, and you can depict it as a wilderness waterway. (interview 9)

The problem here was not that people were struggling to prevent dam construction, or to constitute a different relation to the river, but that this struggle took place on a terrain that could not render the relational and ethico-political complexity of contemporary ecologies visible (see Britton 2010 for an important perspective on this struggle and its “environmentalist” pitfalls). An abject haunted the environmental articulation in such a way that to permit its entry would be to risk having to confront the very limits of the hegemonic configuration that was taken as given.

The environmental object is a strange and complex beast, however, because environmentalism itself oscillates between complicity with a hegemonic order, strategic appeal to that order in the name of its overcoming, and a more direct and radical challenge to its very stability (Travis, environmental health advocate, interview 28). Thus, while in one sense ecological degradation such as toxic pollution is the very object of environmental struggle, it is also this pollution which puts environmental articulations of a vulnerable “nature” in need of saving and purification at risk. Indeed, environmental advocates in Maine are faced with a tricky tension between such environmental abjection and the image of the state's “beautiful environment we call home” (Maine Conservation Voters Education Fund and Environmental Priorities Coalition 2010, 2). The environment is, at once, a site of danger, degradation and threat, and a site of romantic mystique, an “original nature” (D. Bennett 2003, 135) to which “we” (the tacitly privileged environmental subject) can momentarily return for rejuvenation, enabled once again to face the rat race of industrial civilization in a well-adjusted manner.

In this sense, the hegemonic “environment-as-domain” is constituted as a realm of amenities through the exclusion of all ecological entities and relations that refuse to fit into the metrics of management or the images of romantic advocacy. One will rarely find, in the literature or in public discourses of Maine's environmental advocacy organizations, an articulation of “the environment” as ugly, dangerous, disgusting or generally unattractive (see Morton 2010 for a critique of this purified image of ecology). To sustain the image of the “good health, good jobs, and quality of life that Maine's environment provides to all of us” (Maine Conservation Voters Education Fund and Environmental Priorities Coalition 2010, 2) requires the exclusion of—or at least an uneasy relationship with—all that is not

“good,” “healthy” or “beautiful.” As Maine forest activist Mitch Lansky writes, “It is easier to rally behind something big and furry than something small and slimy” (2003, 25). Bacterial colonies, fundamental to myriad life processes, come to mind here (Margulis and Sagan 1997; Margulis 1999). Or, as Carl, the ecologist, described:

Yeah, we want to live in a town that has preserved farmland around it so we can feel like we're living in a rural area as we're driving in ... It's not quite the same as saying 'We've preserved this nasty thicket of a cedar swamp because it has all of the intact species and natural processes that are inherent in it. You know, nobody wants to look at the nasty, tangled cedar swamp. They think it's just a big bug factory, but... that's what nature is! (interview 18)

The environment, as a site of “monstrous and illegitimate” hybrids (Haraway 1991, 154) continually threatens, at the edges and undersides of its enclosure, to exceed its hegemonic articulation and threaten its own stability and purity with a wildness that cannot be assimilated.

Maine's environmental advocates are clear, to be sure, about many of the threats posed to “the environment” by pollution and other forms of degradation. Yet it is around such issues that the threat posed by abjection becomes clear: anti-pollution action risks becoming a challenge to the very structures of capitalist production and accumulation, and must therefore be tempered and held within the confines of the hegemonic assemblage. “Most importantly,” says the website of the organization Maine Rivers, for example, “we need to be conscious of our own role in contributing to river pollution in many everyday activities: using toxic household or lawn/garden chemicals which end up in rivers” (Maine Rivers 2014). Wholly unaddressed in such an individualizing articulation are questions of financial and cultural access to such “environmental” actions (Sandilands 1993), the legitimacy of the entire assemblage through which individuals end up possessing such toxins in the first place, the ongoing operation of 329 known corporate Clean Water Act



violators in the state (Duhigg 2012), and—last but not least—questions about the ways this green consumer emphasis might deflect from more harrowing questions about the patterns of power and accumulation that generate and sustain planetary destabilization (Luke 1998; Lousley 1999; Alfredsson 2004; Akenji 2014). One might argue, as Naomi Klein (2014) does relative to the political threat posed by climate change to the stability of capitalist hegemony, that the overt acknowledgement of toxic pollution in its fullest sense would demand a radical undoing of the core institutions of the hegemonic assemblage itself. Pollution is, then, double faced: partly a “safe” object of environmental concern, and partly an abject site of concern that must be tamed or assimilated. The abject environment cannot be permitted to threaten the structure of the inside from which it is constitutively excluded; externalities must only be *internalized* into a structure of colonial, capitalist anthropocentrism that remains itself unchallenged.

### The Prismatic Diagram

We have now reached a height of paranoia, or, at least, as high as this project will go. It appears that instead of a world structured by three, pre-given and wholly distinct categories—economy, society, and environment—we are faced with the ongoing articulation of a singular, three-faced hegemony. Whether presented in terms of triple circles, nested spheres, or triangulations, this trio constitutes a single, hegemonic assemblage characterized by an aggregated, asymmetrically-reciprocal socio-economic complex, embedded within an environment that it mutually-constitutes, that simultaneously denies and domesticates forms of abjection that it

produces and relies on, and that ultimately serves a semi-abstract sovereignty of economic *force* upon which it is continually made dependent.

The story does not end here, however. There is something “deeper” going on in the articulation of the hegemonic trio that a tracing of the trio *itself* does not quite get at. In Deleuze’s terms, the hegemonic assemblage of economy, society, and environment is continually articulated as an “actualization” of a “virtual” which its articulation does not exhaust (Deleuze 1994). The virtual names a dimension of reality that is not yet formed, always *becoming*, a zone of “intensities that cannot be accounted for in terms of actual identities” (J. Williams 2003, 8). It is a conceptual strategy for thinking reality as an ongoing process of composition while still being able to explain the apparent stabilities that come and go. The virtual is quite *real*, but never appears as such. It is a reservoir of un-encounterable potential that is always actualized, and thus encountered, in specific and limited forms. Economy, society, and environment are such forms.

The virtual is not, however, totally amorphous, and nor is it at all separated from mutual transformation by the actual that it enables (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 149). For Deleuze and Guattari, there are a number dimensions of the virtual itself, one of which they call an “abstract machine of capture” (1987, 446) or what Deleuze elsewhere calls, via his reading of Foucault, a “diagram of power” (1988, 35). This refers to the way in which certain aspects of the virtual are historically configured into particular, power-laden patterns, “cut up and divided” by a trajectory of actualizations that it is not separable from (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 149). This is a challenging notion to grasp, and the term “abstract machine” is apt given the abstraction required: Think of the virtual as a vague space of molecular “intensity” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 142), and then picture a *surface* upon which the actual—

in the form of multiple assemblages, and in accumulations of assemblages called “strata”—is continually formed and unformed (1987, 40). At the interface that this surface represents, where virtual becomes actual and vice versa, there is a zone that contains particular kinds of *patterns* out of which the actual, at any given time, may be composed. Not everything is possible, and these patterns—what Deleuze calls “diagrams” (1988, 35)—determine the array of potential “actuals.” To nuance the picture just a bit more, the “abstract machine” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 50) describes the kind of agency-without-an-agent that *does* the actualization (Deleuze 1988, 75), and it is the *diagram* which is actualized in particular forms. The diagram is, in a sense, another name for what dynamical systems theorists call “phase space” (De Landa 1998), immanent patternings that map out possibilities for different relations of force—different actualizations—at a given historical moment (Deleuze 1988a, 35).

When I wrote, in chapter 1, of this trio constituting a particular “problem-space” of modernity, I was alluding to a more complex analysis. It would be more helpful, I believe, to say that economy, society, and environment “effectuate” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 71) a particular configuration of virtual relations, a particular diagram of power. This is to say that there exists a dynamic problem-space which is our context of existence, and the hegemonic trio is one particular way to “solve” the challenges this space presents. Thus it is not only the case that economic, social, and environmental assemblages are installed as hegemonic, material-semiotic nodal points, but also that their continual articulation as such is the enactment of a *hegemonic diagram* that carves out the very terrain of possibility in which this articulation occurs.

What *is* this diagram? At the risk of overstating the power of theoretical analysis to accurately identify the “true” working of things, I nonetheless want to propose a schema that might function as an anchor or talisman for the “counter-spell” that the paranoid reading in this portion of my thesis attempts to compose. I propose, then, that the actualization of the triple hegemonic assemblage of economy, society, and environment is significantly structured by a distinct diagram that can be presented in the form of three axes: two criss-crossed binaries of *Nature-Culture* and *Capital-State*, with a third directional axis of *Development* coming up through the middle (figure 10).<sup>57</sup> These axes and their relations name particular lines of compositional force that influence the space of possibility in which articulations of the economic, the social, and the environmental are continually consolidated. Diagrammatic forces are not often themselves explicit dimensions of public conflicts and negotiations, but rather remain as part of the background that makes such conflicts possible in their actual forms. To take liberties with the figure of the prism introduced by my interviewee, Carol, at the beginning of chapter 3, we might say that a triple-axis abstract ontologizing machine fractures and re-consolidates multiplicities into the categories of the economic, the social, and the environmental and “projects” this into actuality in Maine (figure 11). A problem-space is composed in which the abstract machine itself is rendered invisible while its actualizations appear as inevitable. In the remainder of this chapter, I will outline—in a necessarily brief manner—some of the general contours of these diagrammatic elements and relations.

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57 I capitalize the five terms of this diagram as a way to clarify their sense as abstract “virtual” nodes. This will be particularly important with regard to the abstract State as distinct from particular, actualized governmental institutions we might call “the state.”

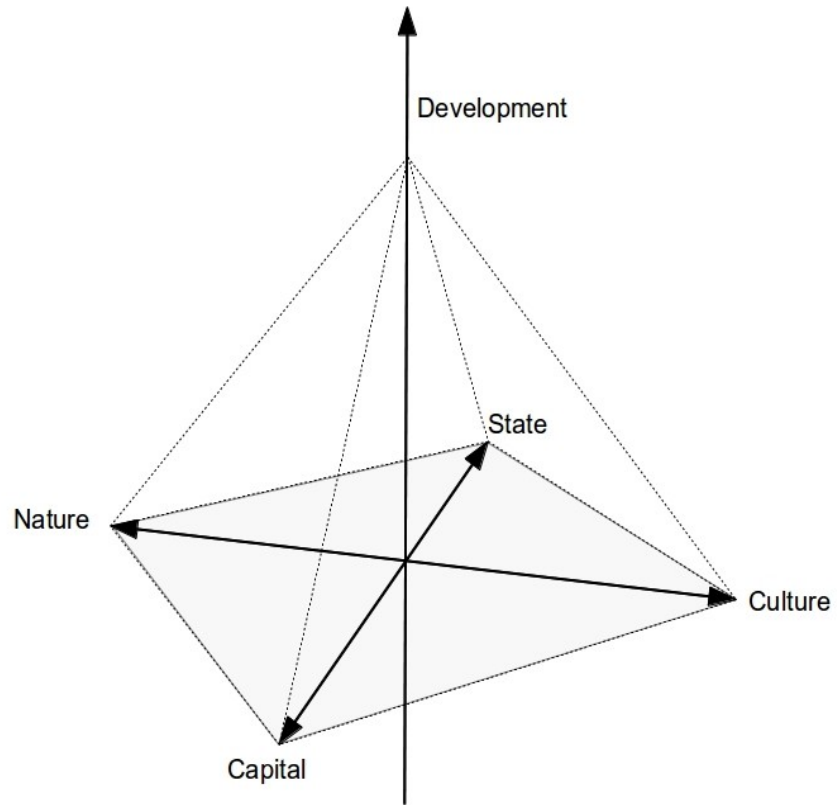


Figure 10. The diagram that "writes" the hegemonic trio into actuality.

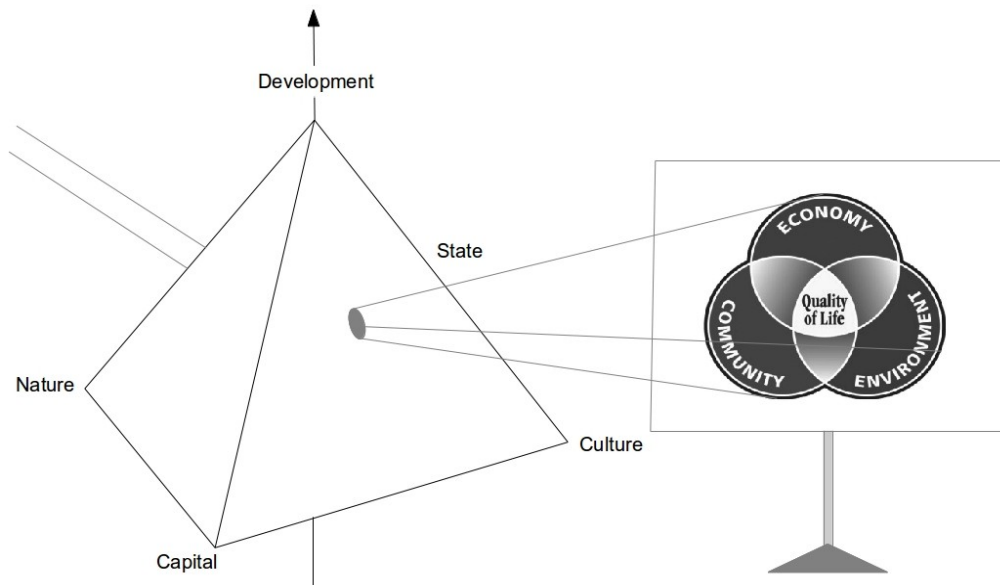


Figure 11. The prism/diagram actualizes the hegemonic trio.

## *Nature-Culture*

The first movement that constitutes the diagram is the Nature-Culture binary—what I referred to in chapter 1 as a binarising machine named “Descartes.”<sup>58</sup> It is also what Alfred North Whitehead referred to as “the bifurcation of nature,” the division of reality into an objective domain and a domain of subjective interpretation (Whitehead 1920; cited in Latour 2004, 50), and it is associated with a whole host of other parallel dualisms which together mark out the shapes of modern colonialism: man/woman, human/animal, mind/body, rational/irrational, etc. (Plumwood 1993). It is not quite the case, as some critiques of dualism have suggested, that power is on the side of one term while subordination is necessarily on the side of the other (see, for example, Plumwood 1993, 42). Rather, power is what circulates in the *whole diagram itself* and enables the variable playing of one element against another. Culture is, on one hand, a site of agency and freedom, where “human beings, and only human beings, are the ones who construct and freely determine their own destiny” (Latour 1993, 30). Yet it can also be the site of ephemeral fantasies, projections, “soft” articulations that cannot stand up against the durable facts that an appeal to “nature” enables. Thus Nature can subsist as “that which has always already been there” (Latour 1993, 30), non-relative and immune to contestation; and it can also be articulated as a domain of passive objects, a “kingdom of means” separated from a (human-only) “kingdom of ends” (Plumwood 1993, 145). Domination and exploitation can be justified and enforced via any and all of these angles, and this is what constitutes the “forked tongues” of European

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58 As Deleuze and Guattari construct the concept of “abstract machine,” it is always associated with a historical moment or process that can be given a proper name. “Abstract machines thus have proper names (as well as dates), which of course designate not persons or subjects but matters and functions. The name of a musician or scientist is used in the same way as a painter’s name designates a color, nuance, tone, or intensity” (1987, 142).

colonizers: “By separating the relations of political power [Culture] from the relations of scientific reasoning [Nature] while continuing to shore up power with reason [Nature] and reason with power [Culture], the moderns have always had two irons in the fire” (Latour 1993, 38, inserts mine).

This is how “the economy” can be justified and legitimized as being fundamentally “about people” (Kathleen, interview 5) while also appearing as an incontestable force of nature. It is how “the social” can appear as an objective domain to be measured and managed, and as a slippery realm in which complex values shape action and generate surprise (thus requiring markets as a form of non-state coordination based on decentralized signaling of “exogenous” preferences). And it is how “the environment” can appear, variously, as a mine, a dump, and a source of appeal to “natural laws” and natural analogies of competition. A whole space of ethical and political possibility is laid out (figure12; presented as figure 3 in chapter 1) in which the Nature-Culture binary is simultaneously reinforced and transgressed while relations of domination and exploitation among humans and between (certain) humans and nonhumans remain invisible or appear as inevitable.

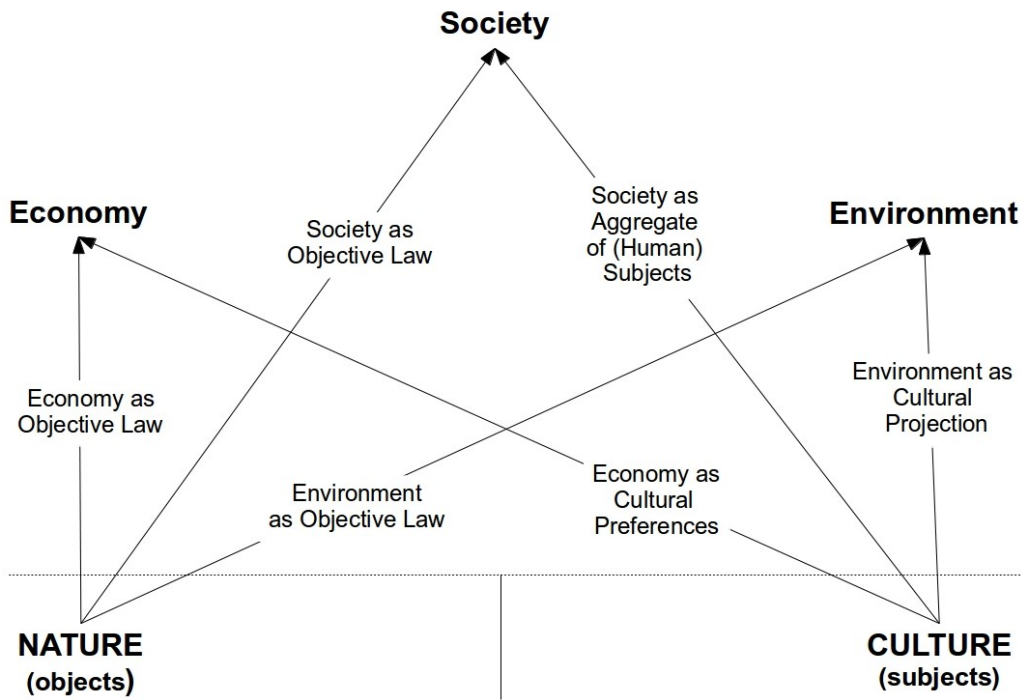


Figure 12. Dynamics of hegemonic actualization: Nature/Culture.

### *Capital-State*

It is not the Nature-Culture binary alone, as my initial analysis in chapter 1 may have implied, that composes the modern diagram of power. In *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour argues that a third term is essential to the “modern constitution.” He calls this “the crossed-out God” (1993, 32), a presence at once denied and necessary and that ensures the ability of the Nature-Culture binary to enact its paradoxically-double relations. This crossed-out God is reducible to neither Nature nor Culture, yet can variously appear in both forms: “His transcendence distanced him infinitely, so that he disturbed neither the free play of nature nor that of society, but the right was nevertheless reserved to appeal to that transcendence



in case of a conflict between the laws of Nature and those of Society” (1993, 33). Without denying the philosophical importance of Latour's absent/present God, I want to invoke the possibility that the insertion of a radical political-economic analysis into this schema might transpose this third presence into the form of a movement between *Capital* and *State*.<sup>59</sup> What is the “crossed out God” if not, at one moment, the invisible hand of Adam Smith, a force that is radically immanent, having “descended into men's heart of hearts” (Latour 1993, 33) yet appearing to determine them from beyond; and, at another moment, the visible hand of the State that functions at once as a site of immanent governmental subjectification and a transcendent sovereign force? The “modern constitution” becomes a quadratic diagram.

In Marxian terms, Capital is a social relation of coercive and addictive accumulation, sustained by enclosure and exploitation, productive of particular modes of desire (Deleuze and Guattari 1983), and enacted as a process of continual deterritorialization and reterritorialization, erasing and remaking worlds in an endless spiral of non-fulfillment. I do not intend to invoke a notion of Capital as an unfolding historical necessity animated by essential logics and “laws of motion,” utterly transcendent and beyond human agency. If Capital is constituted as “self-valorizing value” (Marx 1992; De Angelis 2007, 39), and becomes a force that takes us up into its clutches, transforms us, and even (partially) produces “us” in various radically-differentiated forms, this is not because it has a godlike subjectivity and discrete agency of its own. It is because a wholly-contingent, path-dependent historical web of articulations has generated and sustained a “habit” (Latour 2004,

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59 Mitchell beckons toward a formulation of Capital and State in terms of diagrammatic forces when he suggests that “One could ... explore the relationship between capital and the modern state not by reducing one to the possessor of political power and the other to its instrument but by treating both as aspects of a more general discursive process of abstraction” (1992, 1020).

86) that we can now call Capital. Habits have no essential trajectory and can be *broken*, though sometimes not without immense difficulty.

Capital is a crucial dimension of what Latour refuses to engage yet what nonetheless animates core dynamics of his schema. What is it, in fact, that “creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture” (Latour 1993, 10) in the modern era of simultaneous bifurcation and boundary-blurring? Donna Haraway names it, in a self-consciously paranoid articulation, “the New World order effected by the bonding of transnational capital and technoscience” (1997, 7). As an addictive drive toward accumulation, Capital must continually make and remake its territories, respecting no boundaries yet all the while remaining continually bound up in re-articulating forms of domination that rely on these boundaries (Harvey 1982). It is neither Nature nor Culture, yet appears in the form of both and at the same time completely remakes them. It constitutes a “second nature” (N. Smith 1990), which is not in fact Nature at all, but Culture made transcendent; or not Culture at all, but Nature rendered fully human. It is a paradoxical betweenness, a *neither/and* which helps to render the Nature/Culture binary into both a powerful force and an absurd impossibility.

To be clear, when I write of Capital, I am not referring to “capitalism” as a unified and total *system*. As Massimo De Angelis crucially asserts, “we are not talking about a *state*, a fixed condition in which *the whole* of ... life practices are actually colonized” (2007, 43). As I have already described at the outset of chapter 3 in my discussion of “capitalocentrism,” the term “Capital” here should be taken to name an ongoing, always-incomplete, and always-threatened process of *colonization*: a “social force that *aspires* to colonize the whole of life practices” (De Angelis 2007, 43) yet “*continually faces the threat of its extinction*” (2007, 40, emphasis

in original; see also Lazzarato 2012 for a similar view). Capital renders us partially dependent on its addictive force, demanding that we rely on that which is by definition utterly unreliable. In the midst of such a mess, we oscillate between the certainty and passivity of a (capitalized) Nature and the freedom and agency of a (capitalized) Culture. And all the while, this binary collapses before our very eyes.

Yet just as Nature is constituted by its “other,” Culture (and vice versa), the process of Capital cannot unfold by itself. Its apparently self-feeding “cult ability” (Marx 1992, 255) can only be an illusion, as another process always accompanies and co-constitutes it: that of the *State*. By “State” in this context, I do not mean a definite array of governing institutions, a sovereign national entity, a particular apparatus of policing and legitimized violence (e.g., Weber 1994), nor a mere tool of capitalist accumulation (e.g., Sweezy 1942), though all of these might be its partial expressions. I mean, rather, a *process of power* that is both the “other” of Capital and its most crucial condition of existence. The State names a force of authorization, unification, order, control, inscription, conscription, repression, Law, and judgment—an “abstract principle of power and authority” (Newman 2011, 4). It operates, according to Deleuze and Guattari, via processes of “overcoding” (1983, 199) that render elements commensurable within a system of unified meaning or representation, “facilitating [their] insertion into a whole new level of synthesis: a conjunction with numerous other categorized individuals or persons, in a complex assemblage of thunderbolt judgment” (Massumi 1996, 51). The State is at least as “self-producing” as Capital, composing “a whole to which it will render its law immanent” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 221), simultaneously producing government, governed spaces, and governable subjects (N. Rose 1999).

The State might be said to constitute a force of stability in the face of Capital's deterritorializations, yet this would be to confuse the *actualized* dynamic that is often called “market vs. state” with the *virtual* diagram that is Capital-State.<sup>60</sup> Eternal stability is only the impossible desire from which the State launches and sustains an endless procession of transformations, including but not limited to territorial conquest and colonial pillage. To speak in simplified terms: if Capital is a form of durability that appears as a continual destabilization, then the State is a continual destruction that appears as a stable entity or domain (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 196). The two processes work hand-in-hand, even if at times in the form of combat. At one moment, the State appears as sovereign, all the while handing over sovereignty to Capital. At another moment, Capital's assertion of sovereignty enables the State to appear as the only solution to the danger it poses. Or, to put the dynamic in terms of a diagrammatic actualization similar to that described with regard to the Nature-Culture binary above, each term of the hegemonic trio can be said to variously effectuate the Capital-State dynamic (figure 13). On one side, the economy stands as the force of Capital itself, shaping and demanding obedience as if from beyond. Society and economy are rendered accessories, becoming little more than “social capital” or “natural capital” in various manifestations. On the other side, and at the same time, each category is measured, mapped, and “overcoded” as a domain of government(al)ity that appears to master Capital while at the same time giving itself over to its rule. Whether valorizes key dimensions of life via a “capitalization,” or regulates and control via government (in Foucault's sense), one remains within the diagram of power.

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<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the actual (and hegemonic) distinction between “market” and “state,” and the politics of oscillation which play out around it, only serves to obscure the constitutive role of the State in constituting markets and market dynamics, and the complicity of various collections of capitalists in shaping policy.

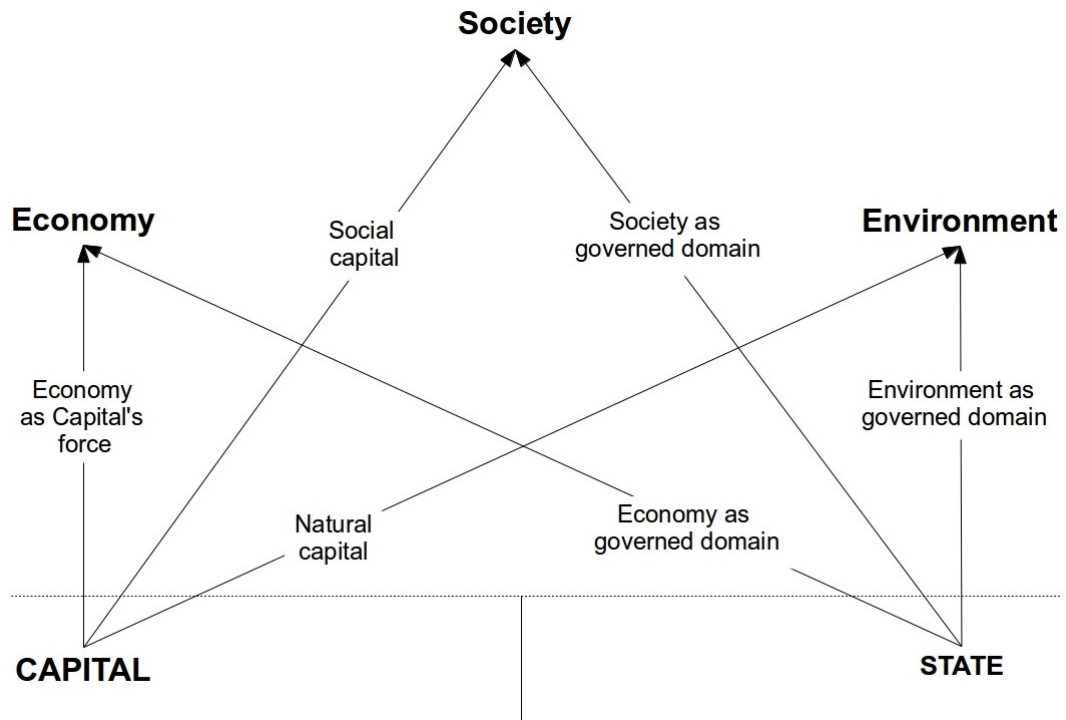


Figure 13. Dynamics of hegemonic actualization: Capital/State.

### *Development*

While Nature/Culture and Capital/State can be conceptualized in terms of two crossed axes (the complex interplays between which I am unable to engage here), a third axis of Development can be seen to travel up through the middle, pushing the whole diagram forward on a trajectory of endless “progress” toward a future which never arrives. This is a crucial animating force for the entire diagram, for it renders what might otherwise be a series of violent and monotonous purifications and clashes into apparent growing pains on the way to something better. On a grand scale, the movement of Development actualizes various discourses by which humanity appears to be “making steady, in uneven and

ambivalent, progress toward greater freedom, equality, prosperity, rationality, or peace” (Brown 2001, 6). On a more local scale, Development constitutes the prospect of greater rewards following a life of struggle and toil, the possibility that one's children might be “better off,” or that “someday” it will all have been worth it.

Development draws its force from its relation to the other two axes of the diagram. In one dimension, as Latour points out, Development's “arrow of time” is explicitly linked to the Nature/Culture binary as a trajectory of purification by which modernity will progressively “differentiate [s] the radiant future from the dark past ” (Latour 2004, 188), separating Nature and Culture, fact and value, subject and object and liberating them from the savage, superstitious hybrids of past eras and “primitive” peoples. It is here that we can see the ways in which Development maps particular temporalities with spatialities, constituting certain (Western, capitalist) places as “developed,” thus further along on the line of progress, and others (particularly in the Global South as “undeveloped” or “underdeveloped,” even “backwards” (Escobar 2012; Castoriadis 1991; Latouche 1993; Sachs 1992). One could read Owen's preference for being subjected to “the economy” over subjection to local ecologies (described earlier in this chapter) as one instance of this developmental purification in action: “better” always means leaving dependence on Nature behind in the name of human freedom and mastery.

Development is fueled, perhaps even more crucially, by the Capital-State dynamic. On one hand, the arrow of progress embodies the drive (habit) of Capital toward endless accumulation and serves to justify this addictive treadmill in the name of a forward motion toward something better. Development gives Capital a teleology, an “uplifting sense of both material and moral destiny” (Norgaard 1994,

43), and thus injects it with a certain kind of *hope*, where alone it might have cultivated nothing but cycles of manic depression. At the same time, it is the State which is to grid, manage, and facilitate Development (Wallerstein 1984, 111), reducing barriers to its movement and assuring that “everyone” has access to the “opportunities” it provides (if they do not take these up, it would be their fault, of course). The State also provides a collective locus for development, enabling its articulation as a project beyond the interests of individuals: a national project, a people's project, a project in which “we,” an “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson 2006), are in it together.

In Maine, economist Chuck Lawton effectively articulates the demand of Development when he describes a divide in between those who want to keep things the same and those who seek to embrace change. There are “two Maines”:

One characterized by traditional industries and institutions struggling against the forces of globalization and another, smaller and less easily defined, Maine struggling equally hard to embrace these forces...One Maine is weary, discouraged, narrow-minded, angry and above all stubborn—determined to bring the world back to the way life was and ought to remain. The other Maine is energetic, hopeful, curious, happy and above all stubborn—determined to make this special place home to both their houses and their dreams. (Lawton 2008, 21)

Maine people, Lawton suggests, are poised between succumbing to a barbaric refusal of economic progress or enthusiastically embracing adaptive subordination to the forces of Development. It is the same demand posed by *Charting Maine's Future*, with which this thesis opened: The arrow of progress is moving; get on board or get left behind. But what to do with the Mainers who refuse this choice?

## Geometries of Power in Maine? (A Deferred Project)<sup>61</sup>

The wider strategic ambitions of this thesis make it impossible for me to return to my tracing analysis of the hegemonic trio in Maine and re-read it in light of the diagram of power I have just described. It would be for another project altogether to do this work in careful detail. I could return, for example, to the story of the Plum Creek struggle described in the opening of chapter 3, and trace the various ways in which the dynamics of conflict and power can be seen as effectuations of Nature-Culture divisions, Capital-State oscillations, and an ever-onward push toward a Development that never quite arrives. This would be instructive, and might enhance the power of a tracing analysis to constitute protection from the co-opting forces of the hegemonic articulation. Seeing the processes of capture and subjection clearly, one might be better prepared to constitute a politics that evades such dynamics and slips away into another mode of transformative engagement. This is the hope on which I have already hung the adventure of the two “tracing” chapters of this Part II.

And yet for all of this, I must also admit that I have reached my affective limit in composing critique. One can dwell too long in this place, and the vibe is not inspiring of the kind of care, hope, and imagination that is needed in the face of such hegemonic horror. I leave the rough edges and incomplete arguments of these tracings behind, then, in the name of fidelity to my larger project. For though I have worked to constitute economy, society, and environment as durable and powerful stabilities, this is not the place where I intend to end up.

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<sup>61</sup> The phrase “geometries of power” is intended to connect the “constitutional geometry” described in chapter 1 to the “diagram of power” elaborated in the present chapter. Doreen Massey’s notion of “power-geometry” (1993) is also a source of inspiration.



## Conclusion: Captured by Zombies?

For all of its apparent power, the hegemonic articulation of economy, society, and environment in Maine is far from achieving any successful closure or stabilization. Indeed, the very abstract machine that it effectuates is constituted by a profound force of destabilization that continually renders its own articulations impossible to fix or rely upon. With climate change, genetic modification, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, and many other emerging “monsters” before us, we can no longer find solace or solid ground in a binary world. And yet the binaries persist, in no small part because Capital “needs” them: subjection without subjectification—described in chapter 3—remains a crucial accumulation strategy relative to a nonhuman realm of living beings, and the many power dynamics that can be played between these powerful “zombie” poles of (post)modern ontology remain strategically useful.

Is it inevitable that we remain in the grip of these zombies? What does escape look like? Having formulated, in this and the previous chapter, a paranoid reading of the nature of our capture, am I prepared to seek out “lines of flight” that are already fracturing the hegemonic articulation? Can we carry the image of the prismatic abstract machine as a tool to mobilize in moments when the living dead emerge—suddenly, in the mist of a promising escape—to recapture us? In the next part of this thesis, I will dig into these questions, attempting to move beyond the “domesticated outside” to the ruptures and excesses of a *constitutive* outside: “the defining limit or exteriority to a given symbolic universe, one which, were it imported into that universe, would destroy its integrity and coherence” (Butler 1997, 138, fn. 17). Indeed, some of the very same characters who expressed the hegemonic

articulation so effectively in this and the previous chapters will return, this time with *other* things to say.

## Part III

# Decomposing



## Chapter 5

# Opening Lines of Flight

[People are] looking for definitive black-and white statements of what economy is, community, and environment. And they're looking for very specific relations, and causal relationships, but we just don't live in that world. (Chad, interview 5)

### Introduction: Ontological Politics and the Crisis of Categories

In order to stabilize the hegemonic narrative of the previous two chapters for strategic effect, I have excluded a whole array of hesitations, uncertainties, resistances, and “messy” articulations that emerged and circulated throughout my interview conversations. While these multiple flows of difference and disruption do not all constitute active resistances, oppositions, or alternatives to the hegemonic articulation—and indeed, some of them are quite assimilable to it—their presence indicates the fundamental *impossibility* at the heart of any hegemony. In Laclau and Mouffe's terms, this is “the impossibility of a final suture” (2001, 125), a definitive tying-up of any social formation. To pursue the Lacanian stitching metaphor further: there are always loose ends, threads in the midst of coming-undone, threads that do not fit the hegemonic weave, and fibers that refuse to take even the form of a thread. Deleuze and Guattari would call these latter forces “anti-fabric,” or felted “aggregates of intrication” (1987, 475) that endlessly disrupt the striations of the weave. Said differently, and re-visiting a theme from chapter 2, an assemblage such as economy, society, or environment is characterized not only by its forms of

stabilization (territorialization), but by the myriad ways in which it is always becoming-undone, becoming-other, deterritorializing toward something new (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 53).

With such a formulation in mind at the outset of my thesis fieldwork, I expected to find a whole array of instabilities and un-becomings at the heart of even the most hegemonic of spaces and institutions in Maine. This was, indeed, the case, and many of these will be discussed in this and the subsequent chapter. What I was less prepared for was the possibility that the entire formulation of my project—the problematisation of the three categories and a movement toward other articulations—would be overtly and consciously *resisted* by many interviewees. I had imagined a far-too-simple scenario, one in which professionals, captured by hegemonic versions of the economic, the social, and the environmental, reproduced the provisional and incomplete stability of these domains in the face of a world that resisted and exceeded any ultimate capture. Maine's economic, social, and environmental professionals, I thought, would mostly tend to *believe* in these categories and thus work to reinforce them, while it would be mostly the unconscious excesses of their work, along with other human and nonhuman actors beyond their institutions, that would refuse and disrupt this closure. I was, at least partly, quite wrong.

Even amidst a pervasive reproduction of these categorical distinctions in professional reports and public discourses, many of my interviewees expressed significant degrees of discomfort and skepticism toward them when speaking in private. Indeed, as I reflect on my interview strategies in terms of their performative effects, I find an unsettling dynamic. If the distinction between economy, society, and environment was reinforced in my conversations, it was

often not my interviewees who were guilty; it was *I*. Focusing questions on the three categories served to re-perform their presence and affirm their importance. I demanded that my interviewees describe their world in terms of an economy, a society, and an environment, all the while intending to disrupt such a description. Some hesitated, some equivocated, and some simply refused. Many people spoke of “shades of gray” rather than categorical divisions (interviews 1, 8 and 15). Harriet, director of a rural development network, called economy, society, and environment “false distinctions” (interview 14). Chad, the state-wide economic development organization director, directly questioned the validity of my project framing: focusing on these distinct categories, he said, “is wrong. It’ll get you to some place, but it won’t get you to talking about the things... the whole package that makes us good” (interview 8).

At the same time, it is not the case that my interviewees proposed an abandonment of the three categories in favor of some other articulation. For every moment of evasion or resistance, there were numerous other moments in which economy, society, and environment reappeared as ontological givens or at least stable points of reference without which the world would no longer make sense. Chad, in fact, offered one of the strongest challenges to these distinctions while also generating some of the most potent articulations of their unquestioned givenness. On one hand, holding these distinctions as “real” is simply *wrong*—they are nothing more than dangerous analytical conveniences. “Draw whatever circles you want!” he exclaimed (interview 8). On the other hand, Chad insisted, “I need to make sure that anything I start is based on some kind of established fact—data, open, trusted, that you can’t dispute—so we start from a foundation we can all agree to. Like, ‘yeah, this is blue’ [pointing to a folder], and we go from there” (interview 8). This

“foundation” is the measurement of economy, society, and environment as performed in *Maine Measures of Growth in Focus* (Maine Development Foundation 2013) and other such reports. Chad resisted the categories when asked about them, yet could not avoid them in practice. This oscillation was common among many interviewees. As I described in the introduction to this thesis, it is also quite familiar to *me* in my own work.

What is going on here? Are people (myself included) confused? Full of unreflective contradictions? Positioning myself as the academic judge, I could tell a story about how my interviewees are duplicitous dupes or hypocrites, saying one thing and practicing another. This approach to critique would seek to “debunk” the myths and fetishes of practitioners in the name of clarity and scholarly distance (Latour 2004b). Such an approach, however, is not only disrespectful to the forms of care and reflection enacted by those I have spoken with, it is also a dead end: having smashed false idols, I am left alone in a world of ruins with the impossible burden of proving that my own truths are not themselves contradictions or fetishes (Latour 2013a, 168). Critical distance performatively generates more *distance*, and I am interested in generating new forms of proximity and transformative *connection*. How might I differently appreciate the tension between embracing and challenging a hegemonic articulation of economy, society, and environment? How can I tell a story that might enable the cultivation of appreciation and political possibility with regard to my interviewees' (and my own) apparent contradictions?

One key is to acknowledge a shared trap. Since the hegemonic articulation is not simply a human representation projected onto a passive material substrate, but rather a material-semiotic assemblage of objects, bodies, stories, and desires traversed with relations of power, we do not simply *choose* to buy in or to reject it.



We are, rather, *obligated into it*, with the very contours of our “we” already (partially) shaped within it. At the very same time, we live in at a moment in history in which the sustenance of modernity's constitutive articulations is continually undermined by multiple “imbroglios” of the human and nonhuman, the living and nonliving, and by the increasing complexity of our interdependencies (Latour 1993; 2004a; 2013b; Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010; Braidotti 2013b).

As I described in chapter 1, the categories of economy, society, and environment—along with the categories of the “diagram” they effectuate—are in crisis. One can no longer wholly “believe” in a separation between Nature and Culture, Capital and State, economy and environment, society and economy. In this sense, two ontological terrains co-exist in a variety of conflictual relations. Economy, society, and environment appear to subsume our reality as an inescapable articulation, while the mess of the world they attempt to organize utterly defies their discipline and division. None of my interviewees articulated this disjunction overtly. Perhaps we survive by keeping these realities separate, enacting a kind of functional denial in order to maintain a crucial semblance of order in a world spinning out of control?

Latour's notion of “modernity” is helpful here. In his words, “the word 'modern' designates two sets of entirely different practices that must remain distinct if they are to remain effective” (1993, 10). The work of “purification” refers to the ongoing stabilization and maintenance of crucial modern distinctions (nature/culture being primary for Latour), while “translation” designates the continual mixing of beings, the “proliferation of hybrids” (1993, 51) that can be clearly seen in phenomena such as climate change, genetic modification, and human

enhancement technologies (Hayles 1999; Braidotti 2013b). To be “modern” is to maintain an absolute divide between these ontological processes, enacting translation in ever-more complex and often problematic ways while simultaneously denying it through discursive practices of purification. It is a contradiction in the strict etymological sense: action against speech. Yet this is not exactly what is now unfolding in Maine. Rather than doing one thing and saying another (the “modern” approach), many of the professionals I interviewed are attempting to *do and say two sets of things simultaneously*. In this sense, they are neither modern nor nonmodern, but working in a liminal space between the two: conscious of both purification and translation, resistant to the erasure or denial of either process, yet often not fully conscious of the active tension *between* the two as a high-stakes site of “political ontology” (Escobar 2008, 15; citing Blaser 2010) or “ontological politics” (A. Mol 1998; Law 2004). My interviewees, I want to suggest, expressed a condition in which we find ourselves more generally: oscillating between a capture by living-dead zombie categories on one hand, and, on the other, multiple “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) which lead to uncertain and as-of-yet ill-defined collective possibilities beyond them.

But what *are* the politics that one can find among a professional class of policymakers, researchers, and advocates? If my interviewees were partially resisting conventional categories, or could be found to embrace an ontology of complex hybridity alongside hegemonic representations of purified categories, this is not necessarily because they are actively seeking or even secretly desiring some radical transformation of social reality. Acknowledging or embracing blurred boundaries, hybridity, or the collapse of traditional distinctions does not make one a revolutionary, as evidenced by Shellenberger and Nordhaus' pro-capitalist “post-

environmentalism” discussed in chapter 1 (Nordhaus and Shellenberger 2007; Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2011). There is no necessary correlative relationship between rupture and liberation, between cracks in the hegemonic formation and the actualization of more just, democratic, and dignified assemblages. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear, referencing their notion of a “smooth” or “nomadic” space that deterritorializes forms of striation and structure, “never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us” (1987, 500). At the same time, it is the continual becoming-undone of hegemonic formations that offer the very *possibility* for any transformation. They are its necessary but non-sufficient conditions.

One could, therefore, raise justifiable questions about the political limits of fieldwork focused on Maine's professional economic, social, and environmental advocates. Indeed, the paranoid analysis of chapters 3 and 4 would suggest that many of them are significantly (perhaps hopelessly) captured by, complicit with, and invested in the ongoing composition of hegemonic assemblages. Are they not, in Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash's terms, “the economic men and women who work for modern institutions wedded to spreading the global economy” (1998, 193), or at least wedded to reproducing the conditions under which such a hegemonic spread remains essentially unthreatened? There is little doubt that this is at least partially the case. Moreover, aren't the most radical and creative forms of resistance and creation found precisely *outside* these institutions of power? Should we not look for ruptures and lines of flight primarily “in the margins,” emerging from the “social majorities” who are already constructing new realities and forms of life (Esteva and Prakash 1998, 194)? Such efforts are proliferating in Maine (see, for example, Resources for Organizing and Social Change 2009), and I hold strongly with Esteva and Prakash (1998), Escobar (2009; 2008), and many others (e.g., De

Angelis 2003; 2007; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013; E. Holland 2011) that more just, democratic, and dignified modes of life must be built from the proliferating, connected, creative work of these grassroots initiatives, “enacting decentralized, non-hierarchical logic[s] of self-organization” (Escobar 2009, 351). No amount of engagement with (relatively) elite professionals can substitute for the crucial work of organizing “from the bottom-up” (Esteva 2010).

And yet we must also be careful to avoid a binary formulation. It is not the case—in Maine, at least—that there are simply, on one side, professional “economic men and women” reproducing hegemony and, on the other, liberated grassroots subjects building alternatives. It is exactly such an account that I aim for this “decompositional” analysis to disrupt. If a liberatory “post-modernity” already exists, as Esteva and Prakash suggest, “where people refuse to be seduced and controlled by economic laws” and are “rediscovering and reinventing their traditional commons by re-embedding the economy (to use Polanyi's expression) into society and culture, subordinating it again to politics and ethics” (1998, 194), then this must be seen as cutting *transversally* through multiple spaces, institutions, and even subjects. No voice presented in chapters 3 and 4 as a representative of hegemony is the only voice in which my interviewees can (or might) speak. Even those who remain consciously wedded to a hegemonic articulation of economy, society, and environment are also subject to doubts, uncertainties, hesitations, conflicts, contradictions, and confrontations with a complexity that disrupts the possibility of total suture. Others are much more open, some even seeking alternative articulations and working to cultivate small spaces of transformative possibility within otherwise (seemingly) hegemonic institutions.

“Inside” and “outside” are rendered more complex here, folded into one another as *moments* rather than topological positions. “Center and periphery thus emerge,” writes Arturo Escobar, drawing on Gudeman and Rivera (1990), “not as fixed points in space, external to each other, but as a continuously moving zone in which practices of doing conversations and economies get intermingled, always shifting their relative position. Marginality becomes an effect of this dynamic” (2012, 96). One cannot know prior to direct and careful engagement where the cracks, ruptures, or transformative possibilities might lie. Who would have expected, for example, that it would be the director of a sub-regional *economic growth council* who would tell me that the GDP is “baloney,” and that “all the economic development stuff you read is... pretty ethnocentric” (Sandra, interview 3)? Or that it would be a private business owner who, of all my interviewees, would most clearly express a critique of capitalism combined with a commitment to sufficiency over profit? Witness this exchange after Dennis had described his alternative energy business as a strategy for social change:

*EM:* You're a bad economic subject. You don't make sense in a conventional economics textbook, because as a private business owner you're supposed to be entirely devoted to maximizing profit!

*Dennis:* Yes. The little tiny scintilla of hope is that by rejecting that premise, we might be able to disrupt the conventional capitalists' recipe or game plan. (interview 27)

Thus while it is not my intention to suggest that professionals working in Maine's mainstream political institutions might or should constitute a leading force for revolutionary transformation, or to propose substituting semi-elite “inside” strategies for robust grassroots organizing, I remain interested in exploring potential openings where fruitful connections might be made. Donna Haraway's “cyborg” politics is a guide here: “I am made to recall,” she writes amidst a

description of her subjection to the violent either/or politics of ecological purists at a conference, “those researchers even at Monsanto who may well take antiracist environmental feminism seriously and to imagine how alliances might be built with them” (2008, 10). Can we identify some of the key uncertainties, resistances, cracks, and potential lines of flight that traverse even some of the most hegemonic of spaces and subjects? Can we begin to name these lines of flight in ways that might help to strengthen them, encourage them, and offer them viable paths toward new assemblages? Might we find sites for unexpected connection, alliance, and potential co-becoming between those on the “inside” of hegemonic institutions and those on their “outside”? This is to explore, in other words, the possibility not only of a “in and against” strategy (Escobar 2012, 181, citing Mueller 1991), juggling institutional engagement with oppositional action, but also an “in/out and *for*” strategy through which we might find and develop linkages, resources, and new footholds for imagining and enacting other forms of collective life. This is what some have called a “transversal politics” (Guattari 1996; Yuval-Davis 1999).

In terms of the methodological process outlined in chapter 2, this chapter marks a turn from the work of *tracing*—following the contours of a hegemonic articulation, as in chapters 3 and 4—to the work of *decomposing*. My interviewees will thus begin to turn against themselves, challenging the hegemonic articulations which they have already shown themselves to participate in. This will not be a turning in the sense of a conversion, a defection, or even necessarily any kind of active, conscious resistance (though sometimes this, too, might be the case). This turning in its most robust form will not even necessarily be enacted by any single subject. I aim here, in the reading that follows, to compose larger and larger cracks from a series of sometimes otherwise disconnected micro-fissures. What will

emerge is therefore quite consciously fabricated, a creature provisionally and incompletely stitched together with scraps whose quasi-complete image will only appear (for now, at least) in the pages of this document. This is the point: to use this space of writing to *dramatize* what might emerge from processes of assembly that can only be prefigured here in rudimentary and suggestive forms.

### Cracks in the Trio

The hegemonic articulation that I participated in composing throughout the previous two chapters proceeds in significant part through structure, mapping, quantification, and the possibility of prediction and control. This may seem paradoxical given the powerful deterritorializing force of Capital and its crucial role in the overall hegemonic diagram, but even this process depends on the rendering-commensurable of disparate beings, objects, and relations—the marking, tracking, disciplining, and exchanging of “equivalents.”<sup>62</sup> Hence the importance of the State in its diagrammatic form: the particularities of Capital's destabilizations must be continually facilitated and tempered by forces of overcoding and reterritorialization. It is interesting and politically-useful, therefore, to find and amplify moments in which measurements, mappings, and models fall short, and in which the human agents of these stabilizations hesitate and become uncertain. Even if Capital (to speak anthropomorphically) doesn't “notice” or “care,” these small cracks offer glimpses toward the vulnerabilities of the hegemonic diagram and points of possible opening toward other articulations.

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<sup>62</sup> Which we know, from Marx, are not equivalents except at a particular (shallow) level of analysis. Or, rather, they must be forcibly *made* equivalents (De Angelis 2007).

I will focus, in this chapter, on a particular set of such cracks before turning to what I will call the “multiplication” of articulations in chapter 6. I begin, first, with a series of hesitations and uncertainties that poke holes in the confident closures of the hegemonic articulation. I turn, then, to a particularly potent example of a “swerve” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 14), that is, a moment in which an interviewee shifted in the course of conversation into a new space and began to compose her articulations differently. Finally, I will describe a number of ways in which my interviewees betrayed a discourse of objective necessity and acknowledged the constructed and contingent nature of their categories. While none of these instances point toward revolutionary rupture, they begin a movement that will gradually decompose the hegemonic trio into something much messier, and much more fertile.

One final note before I begin: There are precious few examples given in the present chapter of hesitations, uncertainties, or swerves relative to specifically “environmental” articulations. This is simply because I found little more than petty instances of such cracks in my interviews. One might speculate that this is due to the proximity of “the environment” to the domain of Nature, and thus its association with the factual and the objective. Are environmental articulations more resistant to cracking than those of the social and the economic? It is an interesting question that I will leave unanswered. Suffice it to say, however, that the “multiplication” analyses of the following chapter will not leave the environment unscathed. This category will, in some sense, turn out to be the least stable and most vulnerable of all. But that story will have to wait.



### *Hesitations and Uncertainties*

I begin with Eric, the academic economist focused on regional development. Much of his work revolves around constructing economic models that forecast the effects of planning interventions and development proposals. Numerous policymakers, private companies, and economic development advocates rely on his reports to make their cases about the benefits of particular projects. From a performative perspective focused on the effects of what Eric produces, he can be seen as a keystone figure in sustaining Maine's localization of the hegemonic articulation, particularly in its economic dimension. Yet in private conversation, a different subject emerges: far from sounding like the Voice of the Economy, he focuses on the limits of measurement and modeling, the dangers of confusing representations with that which they seek to represent, and on her aspiration to offer deliberative resources to decision-makers. I will return to some of this in the next section. For the moment, I want to highlight a provocative uncertainty that emerged in our conversation. Eric described his analytical work on the categories of economy, society, and environment as a matter of clarifying “trade-offs”:

I think it's important ... that everybody have the best information available about each side. Each of those circles [referencing the Venn diagram from the *Maine Measures of Growth in Focus* report, figure 1, chapter 1] have to be dimensionalized. And the dimensions have to be understood, because you can't... at the end of the day, you're going to do trade-offs, and you have to figure out how much you're trading. Otherwise you tend to get into absolutes in which case... augh... if you have no idea what it is you're trading off, you're tendency will be to trade nothing for fear of trading everything ... My job is to make sure that [people] get the best information available about the part of it that I'm most qualified to deal with. (interview 1, inserts added)

This is a familiar approach among those advocating “sustainable development,” one which accepts the general contours of the hegemonic trio and then seeks the

conditions under which they can be “balanced” (see chapter 1). Economists become crucial arbiters in this process, as one dominant stream of their discipline has positioned itself as the very “science of trade-offs” (Lewis and Widerquist 2013, 4).<sup>63</sup>

But what is really being traded-off? What appears as a trade-off only because it has been formatted as such, and what options for negotiating our livelihoods are closed off by this formatting? What if these are false choices? Is the development of Moosehead Lake, for example (see chapter 3), really a trade-off between local jobs and something called “the environment,” or is this frame itself a set up that elides other—perhaps more unsettling—questions about power and possibility? I asked Eric the question in this way: “How do I know a trade-off when I see one, and how do I distinguish between what seems like a trade-off and what might be a failure of imagination?” (author, interview 1). His answer was as anticlimactic as it was powerful: “Yeah, that’s a really good question, and it’s one that I struggle with ... *I don’t know* [chuckles], I *really* don’t know. I’ve put that in the ‘I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it’ box” (interview 1, vocal emphasis in original).

This is no minor uncertainty: one of the most prominent and widely-respected agents of the hegemonic articulation of economy in Maine—one often charged with providing the core data for negotiating “trade-offs”— can neither ask nor answer serious questions about the foundational terms of his work. While Eric’s reports lay out Maine’s choices in the forms of figures and charts, costs and benefits, pros and cons, he also knows on some level that this a dangerous pathway and leans toward something different: “I want to use modeling to provoke question-asking

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<sup>63</sup> This is the whole stream of economics that has taken Lionel Robbins’ famous definition of the discipline as its foundational credo: “Economics is the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses” (Robbins 1932, 15).

rather than answer-giving,” he told me, “People are a lot more comfortable with answers than they are questions” (interview 1). There is a crucial *gap* (a crack?) here between, on one hand, Eric's desire to open spaces of negotiation and collective creativity and, on the other, the professional and financial gains to be made by giving his contract employers what they want: hard facts and trade-offs that render the hegemonic articulation seemingly inevitable.

Such a gap was also apparent in my conversation with Kathleen, the statistician employed by the State of Maine. Her job, like that of Eric, is to provide people and institutions with data about the state of Maine's economy and society; in her case less about costs and benefits and more about the vital signs of the aggregate domain: GDP, population growth, employment, business starts, and such. Kathleen is a key mediator in the chain of articulation through which the Bureau of Economic Analysis and other agencies participate in composing an entity that can be known and measured as “the Maine economy.” Moreover, she is asked to comment in various public situations about the state of things: How is the economy doing? What do we need to improve? What is in store for our economic future? With the appearance of confidence and quasi-omnipotence, Kathleen joins with other such professionals to articulate the ongoing stability and inevitability of the hegemonic formation discussed in the previous chapters. In confidential conversation, however, a different story emerges: the apparent objectivity of numbers upon which economy as both force and domain rest their power is, in fact, a thin veneer. Economic prediction, Kathleen told me, is not science, but is “actually more of an art-form because it's based pretty much completely on different assumptions that you're making and, um, it's very subjective” (interview 5). Indeed, she described her work in a surprisingly self-conscious manner as a problematic

(though necessary) process of distilling numbers from impossibly complicated assumptions: “We make assumptions and then we come out with a number at the end ... because that's what people want” (interview 5).

Who are these “people”? We might think of this word as a stand-in for all who are interested in, invested in, addicted to, and coercively trapped by the necessity of hegemonic metrics. The diagram of power itself, one might even say, “wants” these numbers, *needs* these numbers, and certain trained professionals are paid to provide them. “I mean you've got to be able to come up with some sort of apples-to-apples comparison to be able to make a valid decision,” said Kathleen, speaking in the voice of hegemony. And yet five minutes later she found herself lost in the open sea of assumptions that render her work possible (and impossible):

In a lot of cases, the challenge is that we don't have this apples-to-apples comparison. ... I get questions frequently about the economic impact of different industries, and people don't realize that there are so many assumptions that you have to make going into that. Depending on what those assumptions are and how your model is set up, you could come up with two completely different answers for the same thing just by changing one small assumption. ... And so, on the surface you might think it should be really easy to find out if changing the minimum wage will make people better or worse off. But in actuality, it's really hard to measure. You can make arguments on both sides, depending on what assumptions you're making and how you're tracking that, and how you're defining well-being, and, um ... None of it, in reality, takes place in a vacuum. (interview 5)

On one hand, Kathleen resonated with the demand for hard facts and commensuration: without this, no decisions can be made, no planning effected, no population measured, no rational intervention made. Like Chad in the example given earlier, Kathleen (though perhaps more so her employer) needs “established fact[s]—data ... that you can't dispute” (interview 8). Yet on the other hand, these

facts are clearly open for questioning, problematic, and impossible to sever from a “subjective” world of ethics, politics, and history.

In the face of this complexity, Kathleen expressed an unfulfilled sense of responsibility. Economic professionals often fall short of expressing their assumptions, and the media does not help.

They're not reporting the assumptions. They're not in many cases even reporting what the definition is, they're just saying, you know, '42.' Everybody goes, '42,' not really understanding what that is. ... Someone somewhere along the lines is going to have to step up and say, hold on a minute, we've got to talk a little bit about this! ... You know, when we announce a number are we going to give the background, or are we going to say, 'Yep, let's just let the economists do whatever they want and we'll take their word for it, and we'll take those numbers and run with them.'? (interview 5)

Kathleen expressed here the same yearning as that of Eric, and one that she, too, often violates in public practice: to render the complexity and contingency of metric construction *explicit*, to constitute “facts” as sites of public negotiation, questioning, and exploration. This yearning may be dampened or even squashed by the ongoing demands of the hegemonic machinery, by the fact that depoliticized, naturalized, objectified measures are “what our culture wants” (interview 5). It may subsist more in its violation than in its effectivity, remaining little more than an unfulfilled yet occasionally-expressed rebellious desire. Yet it nonetheless remains a crucial opening, a small but quite real crack present at the very heart of hegemony.

### *Swerves*

One could read these two examples, of course, as minor and relatively inconsequential instances in which professionals express reasonable yet non-actionable doubts about the nature, trajectory, or use of their work. Perhaps both

Eric and Kathleen will remain relatively comfortable with these tensions, performing effectively on the side of hegemony even if offered a chance to defect (though perhaps not; one never knows...). Other interviewees, however, demonstrated much more potent unsettlings that gestured toward possible swerves. Brenda, a researcher working for a nonprofit social advocacy organization, was a bold example. I cited her in chapter 3 as providing an example of socialization tied to a normalized (hegemonic) economic subject. Early in our conversation, she described her goal as providing “opportunity” for young people: “They’re the future of society. They are the future leaders. ... If they grow up more whole and more resourced, with better opportunities in terms of education, you’d hope to see an outcome of an engaged workforce that’s ready to do the jobs of the century” (interview 31). Indeed, while her work claims to be about “young people,” it focuses on *particular* young people: “Low income is a common thread” (interview 31), because it is these youth who are seen as needing intervention, needing various kinds of programs to enable proper participation in the workforce and larger society. One could easily see Brenda as performing a key dimension of hegemonic articulation in which poor people are positioned as needy subjects, social agencies as institutional saviors, while upper-middle-class (white, heterosexual) people remain the tacit normative measure of success and well-being.

As the conversation went on, however, and as I asked questions that sought to interrupt or open this narrative to other directions, a wholly different voice emerged, one that essentially reversed the public stance that Brenda often takes:

*EM:* What kind of people is social work trying to create? ... We have specific ideas about what makes a good person, an effective person, right?

*Brenda:* Right, and who *decides* that? ... We have this middle-class mindset for the world, you know, that everyone... Like, in child welfare, if you look at most of the kids in child welfare they're mostly from families that are poor. That doesn't mean that abuse isn't going on in a middle-class home, it's just that... It's just that to start out that family isn't *like* the middle-class view of the social worker. Because the social worker has achieved a goal of... *status*. (interview 31, vocal emphasis in original)

Her tone grew more urgent as our conversation progressed:

*EM:* So is a certain kind of middle-class human the kind of norm that we're trying to make everybody into?

*Brenda:* I *know!* I wrestle with that personally, because I think, you're right, I get mad about that sometimes, like, what are we saying, that it's not OK to not have enough? To be just getting by? Is that...not OK? And what do we *want?* Do we want everyone to be the same? (interview 31, vocal emphasis in original)

In a critical sense, Brenda raised the possibility of a complicity between well-intentioned social work and a pathologization and stigmatization of poverty (Brine 1999; Dudley-Marling and Lucas 2009; Hansen, Bourgois, and Drucker 2014). “We totally get sucked into it,” she confessed, “because this idea that we all have to be these high-achieving [people]” (interview 31, insert added). In a more affirmative sense, Brenda opened up a space in which the very definitions of poverty, well-being, and “enough” can be radically questioned. Are the sufficiency practices enacted by many Maine families truly a problem to merit intervention? Can one use income as a measure of need? How are we to challenge an articulation that demands accumulation and economic “success” as the primary standards of human achievement? What if there are other ways to approach this? As Brenda exclaimed finally, “How do we *stop* this madness?!” (interview 31, vocal emphasis in original).

It is as if a spell had been broken: the hegemonic assemblage (in this case primarily of economy and society) no longer appeared to Brenda as the inevitable horizon of thought and action, and a whole different set of emotions, thoughts, and

political articulations opened up in our conversation. New questions began to emerge that shifted the problematisation from poverty to the “middle-class mindset” that had stood as an unquestioned norm. What if *this* is a site that demands critical attention and intervention? Brenda raised grave concerns about the damaging pressures of what she called “overparenting” and the expectations associated with a certain notion of “success”:

No one's talking about ... the way that the middle-class, upper-class are raising their children now, keeping them in this bubble-world ... And I've read some statistics about how, especially in high-pressure colleges, the number of kids who seek out counseling once they get there is just skyrocketing. They've been hovered upon all their life by a parent telling them to overachieve, overachieve, do this, do that ... and then you get a little bit of freedom and you don't know how to do it. ... But no one would name that *child abuse*. But if you *didn't* provide your kid with things then you have neglect, but we judge one worse than the other. (interview 31, vocal emphasis in original)

Brenda expressed a sense of her work opening up in our conversation: What if a focus only on poverty was leaving out a whole realm of ethico-political intervention? What if income measures miss the point, and transformative action should unfold instead around questions of the kinds of people we seek to affirm and become? What if her organization should be working not towards creating people who are *competitive*, but rather, in her words, “*compassionate*” (Interview 31)? I asked her, towards the end of our interview, if she is able to find space in her work for stepping back to have such conversations and to challenge conventional assumptions. “No, I don't,” she responded, and proceeded to explain not only the coercive conundrum of being dependent on funds from entities who would discourage such questioning, but levied a powerful critique of profit and exploitation:

We don't talk about Wall Street, ... We don't scream about wealth and the accumulation of it, like the disparity, the economic disparity. We



might talk about the wage issues and median household income, but we're not talking about ... Because the philanthropists we are talking about [chuckles] are giving us [money] ... So no one's really speaking out about it! I would love to see more of that occur! I told you [earlier] about the [guy who founded a social service organization in New York City with the support of a Wall Street investor]. Why didn't he turn to that hedge fund guy and say, 'It's because you make that much money that my children's families live in poverty! Their low wages give you the profit that you are just basking in, and then you can throw some my way to help kind of *soften* the blow'.  
(interview 31, inserts added, vocal emphasis in original)

One can imagine small cracks forming in the reports that Brenda produces, words bending and shaking on the page, tiny tremors yearning to open up something that the hegemonic diagram of power cannot assimilate. Combining her analysis of the relation between Wall Street profits and families who struggle to eat with her questions about our definitions of poverty, well-being, and success can offer a powerful glimpse of a counter-hegemonic politics lurking behind, beneath, alongside hegemony. How can such sites of ethico-political (in)articulation be named, amplified, and connected? This is a key strategic question that begins to clamor for attention.

Brenda is not alone in her double (or, perhaps more accurately, multiple) existence. It is a condition shared by many in her position—perhaps by all of us in some sense—caught between the coercive necessity of a hegemony that we can neither think nor live without and the multiple dimensions of life that exceed it. William Corlett writes in this vein that “the plight of the subject split between discursive demand and actual need suggests a gap between language as signification and what is really going on in people's lives” (1998, 126). I would modify this to suggest that the gap may not be between language *per se* and an inarticulable lived experience, but rather between the language of *hegemony* and a space of possibility

where *other* modes of articulation may be (always partially and incompletely) found, cultivated, and strengthened.

### *Acknowledging Construction and Contingency*

If one set of cracks can be found in the tensions between demands made by a hegemonic diagram of power and other yearnings and experiences circulating within non-unified subjects, another can be found in the ways that some professionals are able to acknowledge the constructed, provisional, and contingent nature of the categories they are also gripped by. In multiple interviews, I was confronted with this surprising theme: Despite an often simultaneous acceptance of the categories of economy, society, and environment as ontological givens, interviewees also spoke of them as pragmatic, collective fabrications. As with the hesitations and uncertainties described above, there is nothing inherently liberating in the recognition that certain things are *produced* and not simply given. Yet such a move is a crucial precondition for transformative action and agency, offering at least the possibility that things could have been—and might yet be—otherwise. Moreover, the explicit recognition of this construction and contingency may open spaces in which politics can shift from questions of trade-offs and inevitable tensions between unquestionable forces and domains to public struggles and negotiations over political epistemologies and ontologies themselves (Callon, Lascoumes, and Barthe 2009; Latour 2005; Stengers 2005; Marres 2012). Can the amplification of discourses of construction enable us to engage the ethico-political effects of certain performative practices of world-making and open creative spaces to imagine such practices differently?

The starting point for such an opening is *recognition*, and this was expressed in numerous forms by many interviewees. Harold, a private economic development consultant, told me, “We created the economy. It's a made up thing, a made up way to measure stuff going back and forth, right?” (interview 6). Kathleen, the government statistician described earlier in this chapter, said similarly, “A lot of what we talk about with the economy, well it's all just sort of concepts and it works because everybody's bought in to this concept” (interview 5). When I asked the program director of a major Maine environmental nonprofit how “the environment” gets defined in her work, she responded: “Um, well... by our board ... [laughs] ... staff working with our board!” (interview 21, vocal emphasis in original). The environment for Dana, director of another prominent environmental advocacy organization, is “a catch-all term for a variety of things,” and these things are determined as much by the politics of the moment as by any particular conception of “nature” (interview 25). Jane, director of a statewide philanthropic agency, proposed quite technically that “community is what it is in the context of the statement or sentence that I'm making it” (interview 39). The social domain, for Fred, director of a statewide community development organization, is constructed by a particular set of “lenses” though which one looks, including a specific “social impact tool” used by his agency to measure (and thus constitute) their work in explicitly “social” terms (interview 34). The list of such examples could go on.

One might say, of course, that a recognition of the economic, social, and environmental as constructed concepts has no necessary relation to a sense that the power dynamics of a hegemonic configuration can be (or should be) transformed. Harold, just cited as calling the economy “a made up thing,” was also clear that competition—indeed, *market* competition—is utterly inevitable: “ We're an animal.

We have to be better than others” (interview 6). This is an important caution that might apply to some interviewees, but it risks missing a more profound insight expressed by a number of people: that these constructed terms and measures function to *produce* what they claim to describe. In other words, some of the professionals I spoke with recognize the performativity of discourse.

The economist Eric, one of my star witnesses for contradictory articulation, provided a clear example of this perspective: “It’s in the measurement that we tend to give form to the concept of the economy. ... And so the question of ‘what is the economy’ ultimately comes down to most purposes to what it is you’re exactly measuring and what it is you’re doing [with that] measuring (interview 1, insert mine). In this understanding—not unlike that of Callon (1998, 2007)—the economy is constituted through a framing, overtly produced by human beings, necessarily selective in its metrics, and inevitably partial in terms of that which it brings into view or obscures. “Measurement increases precision,” said Eric, “but creates its own distortion” (interview 1). Kathleen, too, recognized that various representations of the economy are influential: “*talking* about the economy, particularly in the media, has more of an impact on the economy than just about anything else” (interview 5, vocal emphasis in original). Bradley, director of a sub-regional environmental protection effort and also an ecologist, spoke more generally about the three categories as constructs that work to produce certain realities and reproduce particular power relations. He could have been reading from a critical constructionist manifesto: “What we’re talking about is contesting for *meaning*, and contesting for the access to *power* that meaning generates” (interview 17, vocal emphasis in original).

If some interviewees recognized performativity and some of its political stakes, others named a profound provisionality and contingency at the heart of the hegemonic articulation. Chad, the economic development director cited frequently thus far as enacting significant oscillations between hegemony and its rupture, began our conversation with an articulation of the necessity of “established facts” and gave the relationship between economic productivity—measured as “the value added [in GDP] per worker in Maine” (Maine Development Foundation 2013, 17)—and social well-being as a prime example. But the more I asked him to describe the nature of this linkage and encouraged him to engage the core concepts he was working with, the further we got from the notion of the “established fact.” Soon, the whole trio of economy, society (in the form of “community”), and environment became an arbitrary convenience masking an impossible-to-capture complexity:

People's interpretations sometimes are problematic, in that they're looking for definitive black-and white statements of what economy is, community, and environment. And they're looking for very specific relations, and causal relationships, and we just don't live in that world. And, uh, once you let go of that, or once people let go of that, this is a lot easier to digest and understand. But I think we have to start with some kind of diagram, some kind of lines and structure to just begin. (interview 8)

We had moved from a law-like causal relationship, premised on an objective economic dynamic, to a set of “diagrams” meant as prompts for collective exploration. What had been an indisputable foundation, a matter of fact, had become, in Chad's very words, a “good story” or a “jumping off point” (interview 8). Looking for a sovereign economy whose mechanisms determine our spaces of possible action and whose workings can be predicted via causal analysis? Give up the search, because “we just don't live in that world” (interview 8).

What emerges from these unruly and errant articulations is a view of economy, society, and environment that renders their grounding in a singular “reality” wholly questionable: there may be real activities and exchanges that measurement brings into focus (and also enable), real bodies aggregated (and thus shaped) by population statistics, and real nonhuman spaces, beings, and relations that participate (unevenly) in composing an “environment,” but these are never fully captured by any assemblage. An excess of activity, thought, speech, and desire always escapes the process of articulation through which these categories are performatively produced. They are thus de-ontologized, rendered potentially-open for ethico-political questioning, transformation, resignification, and perhaps even abandonment. Such a possibility depends, of course, on the construction of concrete interventions that work in the cracks, and the next dimension of decomposing—multiplication—is crucial to such work.

## Chapter 6

# Multiplying Articulations

We draw neat little Venn diagrams that imply that the boundaries are crisp and clean, but in fact it would probably be more accurate to say that you have three fog-banks of different densities colliding with one another. (Eric, regional economist, interview 1)

### Introduction

In the hegemonic articulation described in chapters 3 and 4, the economic, social, and environmental were configured as domains, constituted by their contents and by their exclusions, and were all in some sense subordinated to economic *force*. In particular, the economic domain was presented as a measured sphere of monetary flows with private (capitalist) business as a privileged agent. The social referred to two interrelated dimensions: first, an aggregate domain of human activity mapped to and asymmetrically interdependent with the economy; and second, the failure of certain humans to become adequate social/economic subjects and, subsequently, a site of disciplinary interventions designed to partly remedy this exclusion while leaving its overall structure intact. Finally, the environment appeared in this articulation as a domain of passive resources to be exploited, amenities to support economic development, and a set of “externalities” to be domesticated in the form of “reasonable levels” of pollution and the “valuation of ecosystem services” (among other strategies). The contours of these domains can be crudely illustrated as a set of nested boxes (figure 14).

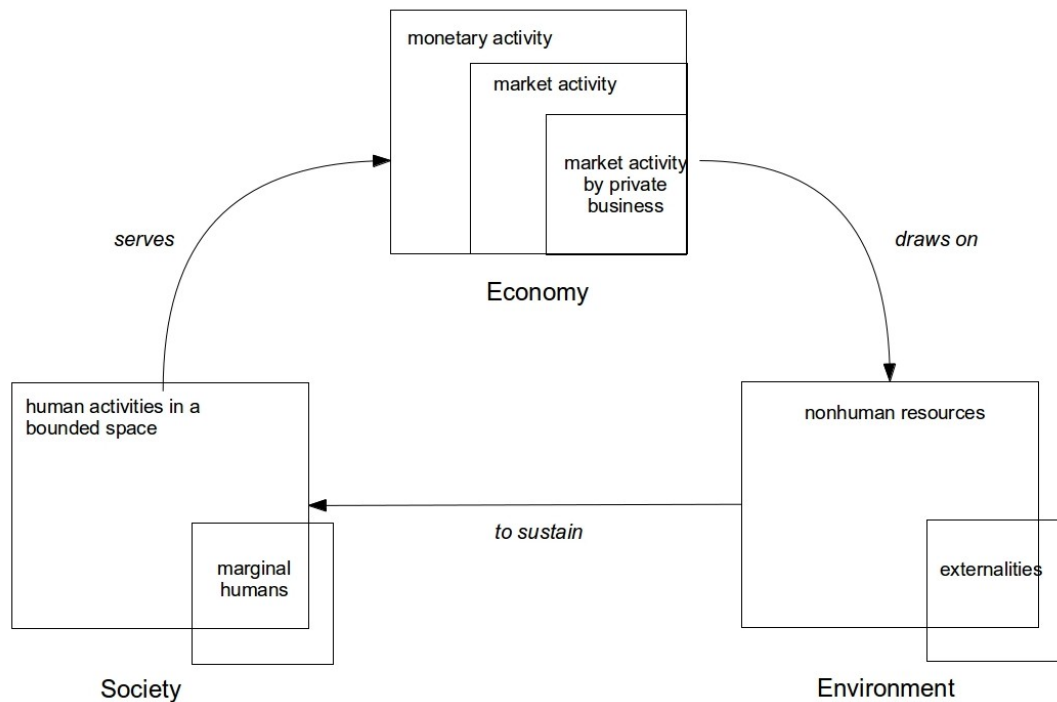


Figure 14. The three domains in their hegemonic forms.

Momentarily resisting the allure of closure, certainty, and mastery associated with this hegemonic articulation, Chad provocatively reminded me (as cited in the previous chapter) that “we just don’t live in that world” (interview 8). What world do we, in fact, live in? *Multiple* worlds, as I have suggested earlier, and this multiplicity is made explicit by a proliferation of aberrant (i.e., not-quite-hegemonic or even counter-hegemonic) articulations of the economic, social, and environmental encountered in my fieldwork. While the hegemonic themes described in the previous chapters were continually and often boldly present in my conversations with Maine professionals, the terms of the hegemonic trio also broke into a barely-countable array of divergent fragments: each of the domains *expanded* in multiple ways, including elements ignored or excluded by the hegemonic



articulation; the domains were *divided* into separate and sometimes conflicting elements; they were decomposed into *processes*, actions through which various agencies were continually and differentially produced and engaged; they were transformed into constellations of *values*, spaces of normative demand and evaluation; and these once-universal categories came to appear as little more than *local* articulations, particular accounts generated from particular experiences for particular purposes. These are lines of flight that—if taken seriously, amplified, and further materialized—would ultimately defy any re-assimilation into the hegemonic articulation that my professional informants remain complicit in composing. In what follows, I describe these multiplications relative to each category.

### Multiplying The Economic

What is the economy? We begin with a small set of boxes (figure 15) in which private business and monetized, market exchange appear to constitute the entire domain. Harold, the economic development consultant, however, began to

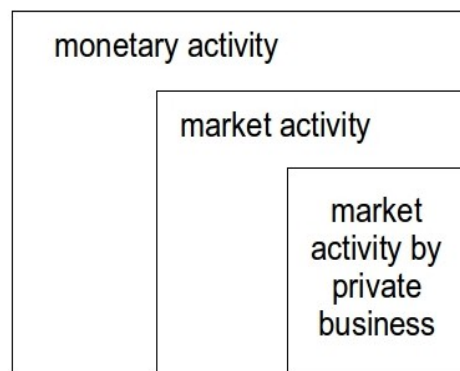


Figure 15. The hegemonic “economic”.

complicate things: The economy, he said, is “the interchange of ideas or products or services that lead to, presumably, a positive exchange for both parties” (interview 6).

This does not necessarily—though it might also—include exchanges of *money*.

Helen, a high-ranking professional in a government community development office, was even more specific. The economy, she said, “may also be the exchange of services *without* dollars. It may be people who are doing *x* number of hours of babysitting, you’ll give my *x* amount of vegetables from your garden. There’s a number people bartering ... when there are few dollars within the town...”

(interview 37, vocal emphasis in original). Marvin, working at a conservative economic policy think-tank, agreed: “An economy is nothing more than the voluntary exchange of goods and services between people” (interview 7). While at first he proposed confidently that “in a modern economy, we measure those voluntary transactions through dollars. OK?” when challenged about the complexity that is excluded from any economic theory, Marvin’s tone shifted:

There’s too much faith in the dollar assigned to something necessarily meaning there’s value there. The classic case in economics is the homemaker versus a secretary. It could be the same person, but in one case they’re at home with the children taking care of the household, but not getting paid for it, they’re somehow less of a person than the secretary who *is* getting paid, a paycheck. (interview 7)

Note that this is one of the public intellectuals in Maine most likely to lend robust public support to capitalism, private enterprise, and free markets as keystones of a moral society, now speaking like a feminist economic critic of the invisibility of women’s unpaid work (e.g., Waring 1988; Folbre 2001).

The economy, moreover, does not necessarily end with exchange. Carol, director of another government department involved with social work, expanded the economic domain further, distinguishing between “the for-profit money world”

and something else altogether: “There are huge parts of this state where there *isn't* a cash economy, but there's an amazing, *thriving* economy” (interview 40). This other economy is characterized primarily by social *labor*:

I think [this economy is defined by ] *effort*, and contribution to some kind of a product, whether it's a tangible or it's a service. So whatever generates that. The world that I've lived in, pretty much since 1976, paid or unpaid has not been the issue. It's been the labor and the product of it. (interview 40, insert added)

Carol proceeded to describe a whole world of underground monetary exchange, barter, sharing, self-provisioning, and volunteer work that sustains Maine families. For example:

I'm thinking about a fellow who is quite an expert plumber, whose offspring have all gone to college. One's working in NYC as an architect. On the books, he [the plumber] is *unemployed*, because he barter. And that is the norm for, I'd say, 80% of that region. He gets paid in fish, he gets paid in firewood, he gets paid in [chuckles] you know, services, he gets paid in a lot of different things. And I know people who've paid him with fish and chicken and vegetables and that sort of thing. (interview 40, vocal emphasis in original, insert added)

Non-monetary and non-exchange activities, moreover, can amount to a significant displacement of the very need for money: “In the volunteer sector, for instance,” Carol described, “the *value* of Maine's volunteer labor is about \$900 million. ... That's a level of effort that towns, schools, hospitals, nonprofits could never actually pay for in cash” (interview 40, vocal emphasis in original). Community response to a fire in the rural Maine town of Pittsfield was a case in point:

Did you see that in the news? Family of nine got burned out up there, and before they had a chance to even figure out where they were going next and have the ambulance deliver them to their brother in-law's place, the community, that they were brand new to, was calling them and saying, 'What can we do?' And I'm sure there's going to be a rebuild their house effort. That's the neighboring kind of volunteering. (interview 31)

Elements of Carol's formulation bubbled through the cracks in a number of other interviews, resonating with a stream of radical scholarship that has sought to reposition market exchange within a much larger sphere of activity. From the “substantive economy” of Karl Polanyi and his students (Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson 1957; Polanyi 1968; 1977; Halperin 1990; 1994), the “whole economy” of Barbara Brandt (1995), and the “total productive system” of Hazel Henderson (1995), to the “diverse economy” of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2008), we find the domain of economy expanding to include all of the ways that “human beings make their living, whether or not this entails rational decision-making or economizing behavior and whether or not production is for use or exchange” (Dale 2010, 110).

The expansion does not end here, however, for a few interviewees also acknowledged a larger set of relations that must be included in any articulation of the economy: our constitutive relations with nonhuman forces, or “nature.” We might be tempted to call this “the environment,” and to repeat the conventional “nested spheres” formulation of an environmental or ecological economics discussed in chapter 1. Indeed, this is precisely where a number of interviewees positioned themselves: “We've sort of lost the connection between the fact that all of this economic activity takes place *within* an environment,” said Kathleen, the government statistician (interview 5). But for others, the lines were more blurred. When Oscar, economic development director for a sub-regional planning agency, described the object of economic development, it was about the creation of and care for *infrastructure*: “... roads, bridges, highways, sewage systems, lighting, the *capacity* to sustain social interaction. ... [and this] would *include* ecology” (interview 13, vocal emphasis in original). To further describe the relation between economy and ecology, Oscar resorted to a pseudo-historical mythologization

reminiscent of so many “just so” stories in economics (Rapport 1991), yet not in the service of the usual teleological narrative of Development (see chapter 4):<sup>64</sup>

I think if we look at prehistory and history, economy was derived from the ecology. I mean if you were a Bushmen in the Kalahari, your economy was about whether you could find water and grubs that day, and the guy who found more grubs had a surplus and so on and so forth. I don't think a lot of people keep that in mind. (interview 13)

However deeply problematic the rendering of Bushmen (also known as the San people) as part of a lost past despite their continued struggles for survival and justice (Sylvain 2002), the “primitive” serves here not to demonstrate an evolution of economy *from* ecology, but rather to remind us that an ecological core remains present even in modern, industrialized, economic assemblages. I was hard-pressed to find Oscar speaking of anything like an “environment” (except with reference to “environmental groups” as political entities), since all infrastructural elements that sustain human life were included as part of a now quite-nebulous economy. Furthermore, these were not referenced in terms of “ecosystem services” or any clearly-quantifiable value, but were subsumed as part of an also-vague and inclusive notion of “quality of place” and “quality of life.” I will return to these notions in the next three chapters, but for now I must point out that while such “quality” was, for many interviewees who spoke of it, primarily about *humans*, there was at least one notable exception. For Sandra, director of a sub-regional economic growth council—of all people to say this, given the hegemonic expectations of her role—quality of life

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<sup>64</sup> Adam Smith's narrative in *The Wealth of Nations* of the movement from primitive hunter to the pin factory employee is a classic example of this kind of pseudo-history (A. Smith 1982). David Graeber, in his historical work on debt and the origins of money and credit, describes a number of such examples where economists employ crude stories to render particular power-laden and contingent relations into seemingly “natural” progressions (Graeber 2011).

needs to be for our rivers and for our fish and for the animals. Yeah. You can't exploit that at the cost of humans. You know, the old 'man at the top of the chain and everything under it just for man's use' is baloney, but that's kind of a cultural heritage that kind of came down. I hope and think that's changing. (interview 3)

We now have a significantly expanded articulation of the economic domain (figure 16), and one that has begun to overlap and radically blur into hegemonic articulations of both the social and the environmental. What has “the economy” become? More than a domain of monetary transactions, of exchange in general, or even of human provisioning labor, the economy morphs into something that involves *the entirety of constitutive relationships that make life possible*. Can this even be called an “economy”? Can it reasonably be seen to constitute a “domain”? These are the questions encountered below with the other two categories, and their implications are profound.

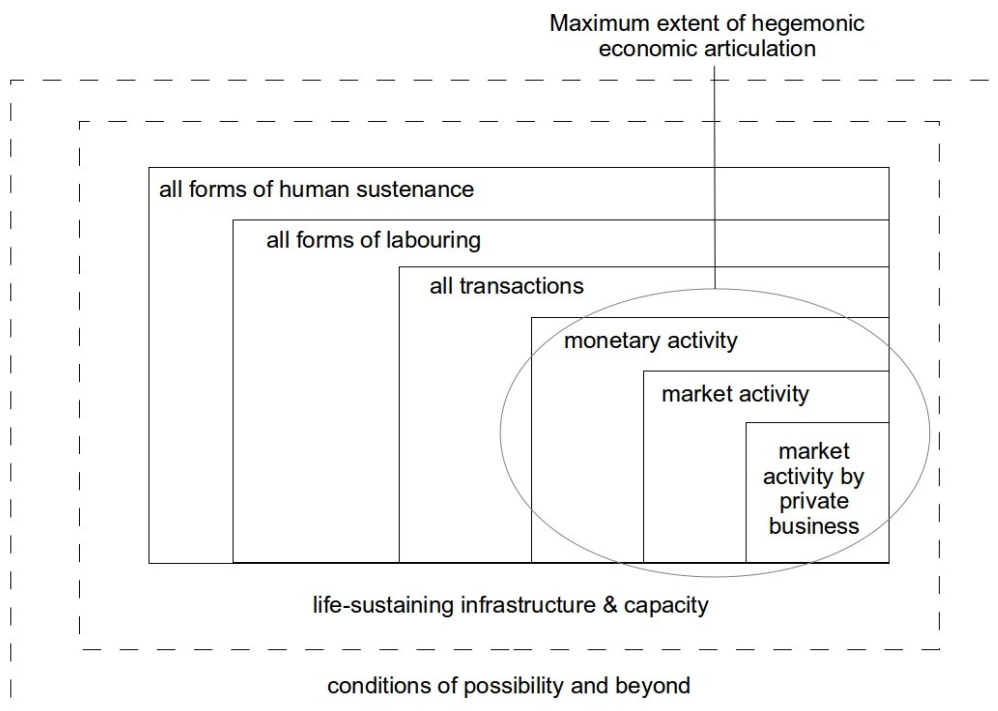


Figure 16. The economic, multiplied.

This representation of an expanding economic domain is only part of the picture, however, for the economy described by many of my interviewees is also *divided*. In one sense, it is divided in terms of a localization of articulations. If the hegemonic formation of the economy appears as a kind of universal knowledge—a “major” category (see chapter 1) constituted via an objective “view from nowhere” (Nagel 1989) associated with modernist epistemologies—a number of interviewees sought to *specify* and *locate* this knowledge. Such an approach is reminiscent of anthropologist Stephen Gudeman's contrast between “universal models,” which assume a singular reality to be more or less revealed, and “local models,” which constitute contextual, provisional, and heterogeneous sets of knowledge practices (2008, 17). According to Arnold, director of a sub-regional economic growth council in Maine, the definition of “the economy” depends entirely on where one is standing. For a municipality, “the economy is property taxes” (interview 10), and therefore any activities which enhance that revenue stream are likely to be desired. For a business, it is about income and profit, which may include the minimization of property tax payments. For a chamber of commerce, it is about the number of enterprises, “how many ribbon-cuttings they go to,” since their goal is increased membership (interview 10). For Arnold as an economic developer, the economy is about not only job creation policies, but also the attraction of young people: “We're really focusing in on demographics as our measurement. Would we not want a business that would hire people of my age category? Of course we would. ... But a company that says I'm going to hire people 17-24, here's the kinds of skills that we want. *That's it*” (interview 10, vocal emphasis in original). What was a single “domain” of measurement becomes a series of *competing* domains, each overlapping but not coextensive, and each potentially in tension with others.

Nora, a researcher with a Maine environmental nonprofit, suggested something similar from a different angle. For her, there is no single “economy”; rather, there are multiple economies centered around different industries, interests, geographies, and time-frames. “I’m not sure there’s just one economy, either,” she said, “There’s short-term and long-term. There’s with externalities, without externalities. There’s direct and indirect costs...” (interview 22). Nora rejected the GDP as a simple measure of economic health, since it tends to obscure complex questions of cost and benefit:

You know, look at a residential subdivision. Is that good for the economy or not? It’s good for the developer, and it probably puts up the GDP, but then it burdens the town schools, you know, water and sewer. And we are told that development can cost more than the revenues it creates, so, you know, is it good? For the economy? (interview 22)

The answer is complex, since in every situation, “you’ve got to define the economy: ... *Whose economy?*” (interview 22, vocal emphasis in original). As Nora then proposed, “there’s going to be a different answer based on whose ox is being gored” (interview 22). The CEO of a social service organization in Maine agreed. For Richard, “the economy” does not always refer to everyone in a given place: “Some of the decisions that are made in Washington,” he said, “really have very little to do with community and environment, and have a whole hell of a lot more to do with economics and really *the economics of a certain group of people* (interview 29, emphasis added).

Is there ever really a conflict, in fact, between “the economy” and “the environment”? Might such conflicts be viewed, instead, as struggles between *different economies* or divergent economic articulations? If the economic can refer to all of the ways in which human beings produce and receive livelihoods, then



environmentalists would simply be economic developers with a wider frame of analysis. Witness this conversation with Elizabeth, a policy advocate for a major Maine environmental nonprofit:

*EM:* [Your organization] is arguably focused on protecting the foundations of what makes life possible...

*Elizabeth:* Land, air, water!

*EM:* ...in a place.

*Elizabeth:* Right.

*EM:* And yet somehow there's this thing called 'the economy'... which also seems to be this thing that provides people with what they need. And the politics plays out in such a way that there are some people who are 'for the economy,' ... and somehow would then see [your] work as marginal to what's really important.

*Elizabeth:* I think it totally depends on your time-frame. If all you're worried about is jobs next year, or profits next year, you can ignore the environment. You can abuse it. You can dump anything you want in the rivers, you can dump anything you want in the air, you can cut down all the trees. ... And the kind of work that we do, especially when we're talking about land and water ecosystems, is much longer term.

*EM:* So is [your organization] really a long-term economic development organization with a more-than-human constituency? [chuckles]

*Elizabeth:* I mean, *yeah!* You could say that! To the extent that the environment is the basis of our entire world and society, of *course* it's economic. (interview 21, vocal emphasis in original, inserts added)

Rather than “environment versus economy,” it may be a matter of multiple and contested economies, articulated around different populations, places, temporalities, and matters of concern. In what ways, and for whose benefit, will we care for our collective means of sustenance? Which of these means will be rendered visible within a given frame, and which will remain hidden?

The division between multiple economies was made quite clear in a surprisingly-common binary articulation among economic, social, and environmental professionals alike. There are *two economies*, I was told in various ways: the economy of measurement, money, and profit, and the economy of need, well-being, and sustenance. Kathleen, the government statistician was the first of my interviewees to propose such a distinction:

I think that, you know, whether you're talking about... the economy as a measurement... or as a driver of well-being, they're really two different conversations. We really don't tend to talk about everything all at once. We either talk about the economy because we want to know how things are doing and measuring it, or we're talking about the economy in terms of, OK, people are more educated, they're doing better in those senses. And so I think we get, we've got sort of two different economies, where it's, yeah, it's *the economy that's about people*, and *the economy that's about numbers and statistics*. (interview 5, emphasis added)

Thereafter, I heard an economic binary in many conversations. Dorothy, the community health agency director cited above, spoke simultaneously about the economy as a monstrous force, “all about the almighty *dollar*” (interview 30, vocal emphasis in original), and about the economy as *community itself*, all of the ways—material and non-material—that we meet our needs. “Are there other ways we can improve the health of the economy without spending money?” she asked in the context of a broader conversation about the rise of consumerism and its effects on younger generations and community coherence (interview 30). Such a question would be incoherent in terms of her first notion of economy. Travis, director of an environmental health nonprofit, consciously specified the division:

In one sense we could say that the economy is the way that we organize how we trade stuff with each other, right? Whereas in another sense, you could say the economy doesn't really even, isn't fundamentally about money and exchange, but the economy is about the way that we produce and provide things that we need. Other

people might call that society or community or something else. OK, we want electricity, OK, how do we get it? (interview 28)

In one economy—what I will call the *economy of accumulation*—the focus is on exchange and money, measured in terms of GDP growth and other conventional (hegemonic) metrics. In the other economy—*the economy of sustenance*—the focus is on the healthy reproduction of human lives and communities, the meeting of needs through various means which may or may not include monetary activity.<sup>65</sup>

The separation of an economy of accumulation from one of sustenance helps to make sense out of a seeming-paradox that emerged from many of my conversations. Why, despite a pervasive sense that “economy” and “environment” are often in conflict, did so many people tell me that this is most assuredly *not* the case? “Inherently I would say no, there isn't [such a conflict]” said Marvin, economic think-tank director (interview 7). People talk about such a thing “because it sells, not because it's real,” said Carol, director of a government social services department (interview 40). “I don't think there's *any* conflict between the environment or the economy,” said the environmental activist David, “There shouldn't be. It's a myth” (interview 24, vocal emphasis in original). David's rapid movement from an ontological (“there isn't”) to a normative (“there shouldn't”) assertion is telling. Two distinct things are articulated at the same time: on one hand, there is no distinction, since the “environment” is clearly a fundamental part

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65 In his essay on Maine agriculture, Stewart Smith similarly identifies two “perspectives” (which we might also call “modes of economy”): first, the commodity economy of agriculture, oriented toward economies of scale and regional, national and international wholesale export. This [my interpretation] is the economy in which an apple is a marketed, graded object aggregated by weight and sold in large batches to anonymous buyers (primarily) outside of Maine. The second economy is what he calls a “state food and agriculture system, whereby agriculture is an industry that provides food and related products to human consumers” (Stewart Smith 2004, 393). These are profoundly different definitions, he suggests, and the associated measurements are distinct.

of what we need to survive—that is, a key dimension of an economy of sustenance. On the other hand, there is a distinction, since “the economy” also refers to a domain or process that is systematically undermining the ecological conditions of well-being—the economy of accumulation. Thus Elizabeth (the environmental policy advocate) can say in the same breath:

I don't think of it as economy versus environment. I think that the economy and the environment are totally intertwined and you can't separate them. ... Which is why, when I get depressed about my work, the reason I get depressed is because I feel like there's an economic system that we're never going to tame, so to speak, that's a little more powerful than the environmental system. (interview 21)

The problem here appears to be that there is *only one word* to refer to two radically-distinct—and, in fact, often opposed—realities. “We really have two different concepts and we're just calling them the same thing,” said Kathleen the government statistician (interview 5). In the hegemonic articulation, however, there is only one term for a single (accumulative) economy, and the other (whatever it might be called) remains impossible to speak of. Dorothy made clear her lack of adequate language:

*Dorothy:* I mean, economics are jobs, and we have an economic development group, and ... what they seem to be focusing on is jobs, jobs, jobs. It doesn't matter what the jobs are and what they do, it's jobs. And when people have jobs, then they can shop. ...

*EM:* But you seem to think differently about it.

*Dorothy:* I do, but I can't... *I don't know quite how to describe it.* ... It's, it's just... I guess getting back to basics. Somewhere along the line, we've lost that. (interview 28, emphasis added)

Two zones of articulation, one word: this is both a symptom of hegemony and a mark of its ongoing destabilization. We have no language to refer to the work of life sustenance that is not always already bound up in the power-laden baggage of the hegemonic economy of accumulation, and thus many attempts to articulate

something outside of the dominant assemblage are easily recaptured. And yet this also suggests that other articulations continually *haunt* the hegemonic formation, rendering it both possible and impossible, forming its (marginalized) conditions of existence yet continually challenging its attempts to stand alone as the singular name of reality.

### Multiplying the Social

While the hegemonic articulation of economy includes a narrow set of mostly private, market-based monetary transactions, its accompanying category of “society” captures much more. It is both the totality of human non-economic relationships in a given place (whether in the larger aggregate of “society” or the smaller of “community”), and the domesticated exclusion of those who fail to conform to its economically-dominated forms of subjectification (figure 17). One might wonder, at first glance, how such an articulation could *expand*. Yet there is room to grow, and my interviewees demonstrated this quite clearly.

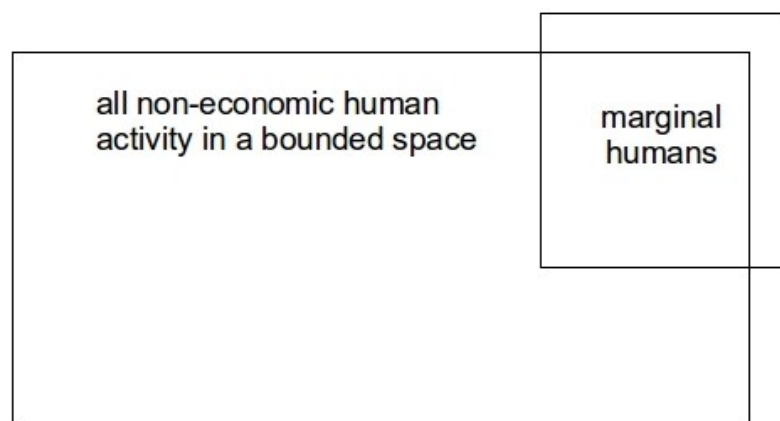


Figure 17. The hegemonic “social.”

The first expansive move is to refuse a distinction between activity that is strictly “economic” and that which is “social,” thus collapsing the two into a general domain of human relationships and sustenance activities in a bounded space. I have already described some of the ways that economy is expanded into a broad zone of human sustenance activity, and where the lines between the economic and the social are profoundly blurred. In my conversation with Dorothy, the community health director, the domains were effectively merged into each other. When asked, at separate moments, how she would define a “healthy community” and a “healthy economy,” her answers were nearly identical. In an effective community,

People's needs are met. They're in safe housing. They have access to healthy foods. Access to physical activity, even if it's just sidewalks. ... safe sidewalks, safe walking opportunities. Let's see... Protect from, you know, it's safe. Think of the lead issues. And environmental issues, safe as far as the water is safe to drink, the air is safe to breathe. ... People are supportive of each other. (interview 30)

In a “healthy economy,” Dorothy described later in our conversations, “I’m not seeing that there isn’t any *want*. There’s always want, but it would be nice if there wasn’t *need*. You know? There are things that people need. Safe housing, good food, you know, a safe environment, opportunities to stay healthy, you know, good medical care...” (interview 30, vocal emphasis in original). Community is economy is community, at least when both are “healthy.” One could interpret government statistician Kathleen’s proposal in a similar way: “The economy is about how *people* are doing. ... It all comes down to *people*” (interview 5, vocal emphasis in original).

In these cases, an expanded or blurred socio-economic domain can easily remain restricted to a particular bounded location: a “society” or a “community,” now constituted by a more integrated measure yet nonetheless separated from other societies or communities. One can still speak, here, of Maine’s collective,

competitive dynamic with other states. This risks reproducing a dimension of the hegemonic articulation by which one place is pitted against another, even if their measures are now “quality of life” rather than simply a rate of GDP growth. Furthermore, the possibility of erasing the complex ethical questions that arise between places in a globally-connected sustenance network remains strong. This is a key danger (though not an inevitability) of the activist vision of “local economies” that has arisen in Maine and many other places in recent years (Douthwaite 1996; Shuman 2000; Hines 2000; Berry 2002; S. Mitchell 2006): a holistic parochialism articulated in what Doreen Massey calls “a hegemonic geography of care and responsibility which takes the form of a nested set of Russian dolls ” (2004; see also Popke 2003), with ethical concern strongest and the local level and dissipating at ever-wider scales (for critiques of this, see Kovel 2007; Hahnel 2007). Finally, the continuation of a clearly-bounded socio-economic articulation risks strengthening dangerous neoliberal trends around the devolution of collective responsibility from larger aggregates (most often the state) to “communities” (N. Rose 1999; N. Rose and Miller 2008), a problematic process that Ash Amin refers to as the “localization of the social” (2005).

At least one of my interviewees, an economist focused on forest policy, challenged the tendency to eclipse complex interconnectivity in the name of one's own “place.” We were discussing a recent controversy over a proposed copper mine in the northernmost county in Maine:

Environmentalists used this convenient argument. They said, “We're absolutely opposed. We couldn't possibly have a copper mine in Aroostook County. Look at all those copper mines in Bolivia, and how they've wrecked the place.” [This] basically says, “Well ... we're fine with buying all of our copper from the mines in Bolivia, that are wrecking Bolivia. But we will not allow them in our state.” This is one of those kind of attitudes that needs a little bit of unpacking. That's

the idea, if we can save my environment, as long as I can buy my copper or bring my electricity from somewhere else. (Matthew, interview 9)

While Matthew did not explicitly re-articulate the social in terms of global connection, this is the implication of his critique of localist environmental politics in Maine. Taking liberties with this interpretation, the social can be seen to expand beyond place-bound aggregates of human activity to something more like a *global* aggregate: the social as the interconnectedness of humanity. “To address these big gigantic subject matters like energy, food supply, water supply,” said Dennis, the radical business owner cited at the beginning of this chapter, “in the age of a global economy, you're going to have to have humans deciding whether they're going to cooperate or if they're going to compete” (interview 27).

Does the social end, then, at the boundaries of humanity? In even the most radical of articulations, this is often the case, for here the diagrammatic boundary between (nonsocial) Nature and (social) Culture is reached. I cannot say that any of my interviewees explicitly ruptured this boundary, but the economic growth council director Sandra's extension of “quality of life” to include rivers, fish, and other animals certainly gestured in this direction (interview 3, quoted above). Dorothy, the community health director, also affirmed a kind of more-than-human social ethic:

*EM:* One last question. Healthy people, healthy communities: Does that also include other species?

*Dorothy:* Oh yeah! You're talking animals and... and, yeah, like pets and... well, yeah. I mean, we all should live together in harmony [chuckles] and... I'm not *thrilled* about hornets by any means, but I won't kill one if I don't have to! [chuckles] ... I have houseplants that I've had for 45 years. ... And again, when you talk about diets and everything, all these dogs being poisoned by these treats and foods, that's really scary. And you look at the social factor, how important



pets are to people. ... that *connection*. (interview 30, vocal emphasis in original)

Donna Haraway (2008) would not be surprised to find “companion species” mediating and challenging the line between the social and the environmental, rupturing a wall that will then be difficult to close. As soon as intimate nonhuman co-habitants are brought into the folds of community, she writes, “the Great Divides of animal/human, nature/culture, organic/technical, and wild/domesticated flatten into mundane differences—the kind that have consequences and demand respect and response” (Haraway 2008, 15).

What *does* demand response? For Jeff Popke (2003; 2009), drawing together threads from Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy and others, this is the fundamental question of ethical practice. Rather than encountering a pre-defined space in which care is to be enacted, the “community without essence” (Watkin 2007; discussing Nancy 2000) or the “being-in-common” (Nancy 1991) that is our shared condition of existence calls us to continually ask and struggle over questions of *who* to care for and *how*. “What we deem ‘the social,’” writes Popke, “should thus be seen as an agonistic space of negotiation over the very meaning and contours of the in-common” (2009, 18). The social comes to signify, in this articulation, an ever-open sphere of possible relations to which we might be responsible.<sup>66</sup>

Among some of my interviewees, this was exactly what emerged: “For me,” said Brenda, the nonprofit youth advocate cited above, “I think of community as being, ‘What is our interconnectedness?’ And that occurs in all kinds of different

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<sup>66</sup> This notion of ethics as an open question of responsibility amidst complex interdependency is also shared and further elaborated by J.K. Gibson-Graham and others in the Community Economies Collective (see, for example, Gibson-Graham 2006a; Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009; E. Miller 2013; Hill 2014). I will engage this work further in chapter 7.

ways, not just relationships but through our taxes and through our commerce and through our... So all of that coming together creates community” (interview 31). Brenda resisted the kind of notion of community or sociality that demands a definition of who is “in” and who is “out,” and instead called forth an articulation which begins with a fundamental question: “how do we all be together in that space of community, and *help* each other?” (interview 31). In a slightly different but complimentary way, the director of a statewide community health organization (Grace), suggested that “community” is often defined in terms of specific—often marginalized—groups, as when an outreach effort seeks to encourage “participation from the community” or get “community voices” involved in decision-making (interview 32). But rather than affirming the social as a domain of the (partially) excluded, Grace aspired to view the definitional dimension of “community” as an ethical and political *tool*: “I sometimes think community allows you to frame your work in a way that you're being really intentional about the *who* and the *where* and the *why*, like why are we engaging or interacting?” (interview 32).

The social has now expanded well beyond the bounded, located space of non-economic human activity (figure 18). As with the economic, such an expansion also constitutes a decomposition away from the very notion of a “domain” towards something much more fluid and processual. Thus I can hear in my interviews a set of social articulations that constitute society and community as continual *processes* of negotiation and decision-making. Trevor, director of a sub-regional planning agency, described tensions between different visions of economic development. Bethel, a small rural town adjacent to a large ski resort, does not have to follow in the footsteps of North Conway, a highly-developed and commercialized tourist hub in New Hampshire's White Mountains:

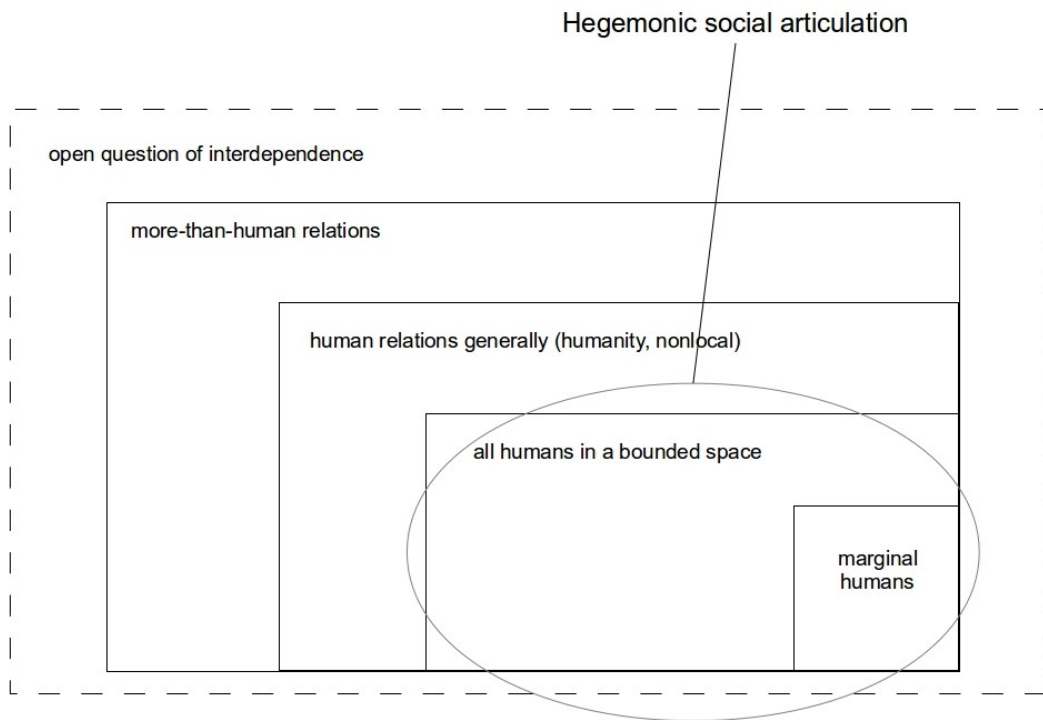


Figure 18. The social, multiplied.

There's an opportunity that can either be realized or bypassed. They have different sets of opportunities to either seize or not seize, depending on what they want to see their community aspire to. Now, that's where community comes in. *It's a decision-making process.* Bethel does not want to be North Conway. Ask them! Now, is North Conway economic development? Yeah. Is that what you want? No. That balance of quality of life, not just place, the quality of life, the experience of people that live in Bethel and whatever they're going to say yes, we want a piece of pie, but we don't want *that* pie. (interview 11, emphasis added)

Community is formulated here not only as the open question of interdependence, but as the very *process of negotiating* this interdependence and making decisions about the kinds of futures we wish to collectively construct. The social becomes, in the words of the environmental nonprofit director Paula, the very *work* of imagining and crafting a collective future: “Fundamentally what I think we're trying to do is figure out how we're going to share this planet together, and what are going to be the rules of the game” (interview 26).

## Multiplying the Environmental

The multiplication of the environmental domain is, in many ways, much more complex and strange than that of the economic or the social. This is partly because it already stands, in the hegemonic articulation, as the “outside” of the economic and the social and thus cannot be seen to *expand* in the same way, adding dimensions like layers of an onion. The multiplication of the environment moves, instead, in the other direction: it appears *inside* the very places where it should not be, and at the very same time it disappears *as an environment* when located at any of its supposed sites. In this way, which I will elaborate below, it appears as both everywhere and nowhere, everything and nothing. The environment, in fact, will turn out to be the third term that transforms the binary of economy and society into a *crowd*, a “third wheel” that destabilizes the couple.

Nora, the environmental nonprofit researcher, described the complexity of the category: “There are a lot of environments,” she said, “There's the *natural* environment, the *political* environment, there's the *social* environment. ... [and] obviously climate change is much bigger than the natural environment, it's the *economic* environment...” (interview 22, vocal emphasis in original). For Harold, the economic development consultant, “You have to look at the context, it can mean *built* environment, *political* environment, [or] you know, the *green* environment” (interview 6). Suddenly, “the” environment disappears. If, in the hegemonic articulation of the previous two chapters, the environment was an objective, nonhuman space from which resources can be extracted and amenities mobilized, it now begins to multiply into something nearly unrecognizable. What, specifically, do these different multiplying terms refer to? Quite strangely, attempts to actually

locate “the environment” in any of its various forms often fail: like a thin wisp of a cloud, the closer one gets to the substance of this domain, the less substantial it appears.

“What *is* the environment?” I asked my interviewees. Rather than offering definitions, they most often told me stories and described particular challenges, threats, or commitments. Witness Dorothy, the community health director:

*EM:* When you think about the environment, what is that for you?

*Dorothy:* I'm concerned about my neighbors' outside wood boiler, when I can smell plastic burning in it. I'm concerned about the river that used to run clear, now there's a campground with a hundred sites up it, and now it's green. Algae, green, slimy stuff because more and more people are using it. I'm concerned about the person whose culvert keeps washing out and they keep dumping more and more dirt into it and all that gravel is working it's way down the river.  
(interview 30)

Indeed, none of Maine's “environmental” organizations can truly be said to focus on protecting, conserving, stewarding, or healing an “environment.” Everything comes down to a specific project in a specific place, a particular species or watershed, a chemical, a toxic production process, a particular causal chain that leads from a specific human (often industrial) action to a specific harm. Environment Maine, a major statewide coalition, does not have “the environment” as its object at all, but rather (among other things) a proposed oil pipeline along the shores of Sebago Lake, “130 tracts of land within [Acadia National Park] that are privately owned and at risk of being developed,” the Atlantic Salmon population of the Kennebec and Androscoggin Rivers, and the carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants in the Midwestern United States (Environment Maine 2014, insert added). In Bruno Latour's terms, “it is always *this* invertebrate, *this* branch of a river, *this* rubbish

dump or *this* land-use plan which finds itself the subject of concern, protection, criticism or demonstration” (1998, 221).

The environment is, in fact, a “floating signifier” (Laclau 2005, 131) that functions to link together otherwise disparate matters of concern into something that can be articulated as a seeming whole. “The environment as a problem,” write Macnaghten and Urry, “came to be created or 'invented' through issues and politics which were apparently not directly concerned with a single unambiguous environment as such” (1998, 21). As Dana, director of a statewide environmental organization described to me, “I think [the environment is] a catch-all term for a variety of things. I think it means... a *lot* [laughs] the way I would define it. It's our air, our land, our water, our energy future, the health of our families, our healthy food [chuckles]” (interview 25, vocal emphasis in original). The environment as a whole must be produced as such, or, in Dana's self-conscious terms, “captured”: “So... in this ... [points to a recent report by her organization] ... this is the best job that we've done to capture [laughs] ... *capture* the environment” (interview 25, vocal emphasis in original). Look too closely at this wide-meshed net, and its contents will escape through the holes.

Even in articulations where “the environment” was taken as an actual object or domain by my interviewees, a multiplication spiraled out of control and dissolved the category by diffusion rather than magnification. The discourse of “environmental health” is a case in point. Here, at the intersection of an external context and the intimate space of the human body, the environment begins to blur. As Bradley, director of a nonprofit conservation collaborative asked, “Is lead paint an environmental issue or not? ... Certain environmentalists would say, 'No, that's not the environment.' And yet what could be more 'environment' than the place you

live?” (interview 17). Yet the place one lives—the household—is *not* the environment of the hegemonic articulation, since it is ostensibly a *human* space, a civilized space, an “inside” space of culture as opposed to an “outside” of nature. What does the environment become here? What remains that is *not* the environment? Brenda, the nonprofit youth advocate cited above, initially responded to my queries about her organization's approach to “the environment” with a distancing move:

We don't talk about the environment here enough, I think. ... We don't talk about the natural resources of Maine here, but that is as impactful on children as anything else, as market forces! [chuckles]. Their water, the air that they breathe, their access to food that's locally grown and healthy versus processed .... (interview 31)

Yet she quickly caught herself in her own assumptions, stumbling on her words as she spoke: “In terms of the health of children, we don't... We've done papers on lead poisoning, but even then, that's man-created poison in the house, rather than out... although that's man-created, too, so never mind...” (interview 31). She doesn't work on the environment, since that term indicates an *outside*; yet she *does* work on lead poisoning, which is about an *inside*. But perhaps it is the *source* of the poisoning that makes something “environmental”? Thus creation by “man” would indicate a social problem and creation by nonhumans would be environmental? Yet environmental problems on the “outside” are precisely problems created by *humans*! Brenda found herself in a mire of circular definitions, the sum total of which seemed to indicate that “the environment” might, in fact, be *everywhere*, and thus already a concern of her organization despite its lack of overt recognition.

Such a move to include human health in “the environment” can be awkward for conventional environmental organizations. Elizabeth, the environmental nonprofit policy advocate, described her organization's move *away* from a focus on toxic accumulations in human bodies:

One of the things that we've struggled with is human health. Because historically we didn't really do a lot of human health-related things. And then in our toxics project, we did get into issues that—while they have what I would call environmental impacts—the primary impacts are human health issues. ... But at this point in time we're saying to ourselves, well, there are other groups that focus primarily or exclusively on human health, and maybe this is the time for us to shift some of our resources from something that's purely a human health issue to something that seems to have more interaction with the environment. (interview 21)

It is difficult to decide: Are toxins adequately “environmental”? Is the environment about nonhumans or about humans? If it is about both, then what does the term even *mean*? The Maine Environmental Priorities Coalition's *Investing in Maine's Environment* report (2010) is similarly awkward when it attempts to place the goal of “healthy people” amidst a discursive context in which “the environment” has been defined primarily as a production-oriented resource and an aesthetically-pleasing amenity. The text carries us, without transition, from the goal of “maintaining our solid roots in the beautiful environment we call home” (2010, 2) to the disturbing revelation that “too many Maine babies are born polluted from toxic chemicals” (2010, 3). Can we have it both ways? The very nature of the environment shifts in these pages: it was our paradise; now it is the poison inside of us. What, then, *is* it? It is not *all* of the things that might compromise human bodies; it is not disease caused by wild bacteria acting independently of human influence, or any force of nature that renders us unhealthy. “Environment-related chronic disease” is a product of “toxic chemicals... found in workplaces and community environments” (2010, 4); a product of human beings. The environment is *us*.

Indeed, this internalized environment blurs into the very tissue of the human body itself, for the “environment” as a source of lead and other toxins is an environment that exists for humans only in its active *circulation*. Lead in raw form,



buried as ore in the ground, is not the environment. Lead mixed into a matrix of paint on an old windowsill, peeling, flaking, entering bodies and lodging itself there: *this* is the environment. This environment is what we breathe and what we eat, and since breathing and eating are acts of intimate ingestion—in which air and food enter us and touch us from the inside—the environment is inevitably located *within* our very bodies. Humans make “the environment,” eat “the environment,” and *are* “the environment.” What is *not* the environment? Perhaps only that which is an environment for *another* who is not “us.”

This confusing tangle of articulations can be approached from another angle. In my conversation with the environmental activist David, the environment was initially described as “the place that all living things reside, this planet” (interview 24). Here we see a conventional sense of environment as a bounded space. This space is, moreover, the source of all sustenance: “I think that every organism needs to utilize the environment in order to survive” (interview 24). The environment might still be constituted here as a passive resource, a singular domain of “stuff” relative to a world of self-preserving organisms. But David's next statement seemed to pull the rug out from any hegemonic stability: “Whether you're a fungus in the soil or you're a human being, you're going to alter the environment in order to survive” (interview 24). For a human, the fungus in the soil is “the environment,” one element of that which is necessary for survival, and one element that will be inevitably altered by the work of making a living (at least under any agricultural regime of subsistence). For a fungus, the *human* might be “the environment,” as one dimension of the space of subsistence that must be navigated and negotiated, perhaps even altered. If all living beings thus alter “the environment,” then this term can only refer to the entirety of complex interpenetrating processes of life-

negotiation through which all “insides” and “outsides” are constituted relative to others. Far from being the “place” where “all living things reside” (interview 24), the environment in its absolute sense names the very *process* of this residence and the sum total of its ongoing effects. In its relative sense, the environment is—for humans or any other organism—that which we use and alter, and that which uses and alters *us*. “There is no environment as such,” writes Timothy Morton, quoting Darwin, “It’s all ‘distinct organic beings’” (2010, 60).

The environment opens here into what Morton calls “the ecological thought” (2010). With whom is our fate interdependent? “Who or what is interconnected with what or with whom?” (Morton 2010, 15). The ecological thought is the notion—terrifying when taken seriously—that *everything is connected to everything else*. “The ecological thought surpasses what passes for environmentalism,” proposes Morton (2010, 3), because it destabilizes “the environment” as a domain of resources and amenities and indicates, instead, a set of complex and unsettling questions about what it means to be alive with others in an interconnected pluriverse. Latour makes similar move when he defines “ecology” not as a science of certainty, but as a site of radical questioning. Ecology “does not know what makes and does not make up a system. It does not know what is and is not connected” (Latour 1998, 228). A Maine ecologist affirmed this very definition. Ecology, suggested Greg, director of an environmental research initiative, is the very *opposite* of the identification of the “laws” of nature:

There’s too many interacting factors, and they are never the same in every place. And ones that you think might not be that important send a trajectory off this way—a different species, a different history, a different geology, a different precipitation—and all of a sudden it doesn’t work that way anymore. ... The details really matter. You can’t specify a couple of things [and say], ‘*That* governs everything’. (interview 15, insert added, vocal emphasis in original)

Dennis, the anti-capitalist business owner cited at in the introduction to this chapter, described the immensity of the *experience* of this kind of ecology: “When you turn the ignition on an internal combustion engine, you impact every human on the planet. When you have a child, you do the same thing” (interview 27). The economic, the social, and the environmental all collapse here into a space of questions. This complexity, as Latour points out, “suspends our certainties with regard to the sovereign good of human and non-human beings, of ends and means” (1998, 228). In this sense, it opens a radical space of *ethics*. “The ecological thought,” writes Morton, “thinks big and joins the dots. It comes as close as possible to the strange stranger, generating care and concern for beings, no matter how uncertain we are of their identity, no matter how afraid we are of their existence” (2010, 19).

The environment implodes while also multiplying (figure 19): at first appearing in the home and the workplace, then inside the body itself, then from an outside beyond the domain of named and measured resources, and finally from an outside beyond even the “human” and “nonhuman”—an “inhuman” (Clark 2011) that is our collective exposure to an existence that utterly exceeds us and about which we can only ask questions to which there are no answers. This destabilization of certainties and solidities is radically different than the deterritorializing forces of Capital and State described in chapter 4. Rather than rendering a world in which “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx and Engels 2012; Berman 1983), the environment in the form of the ecological thought suggests that all that is solid may in fact be *connected* to air in ways that we cannot imagine.

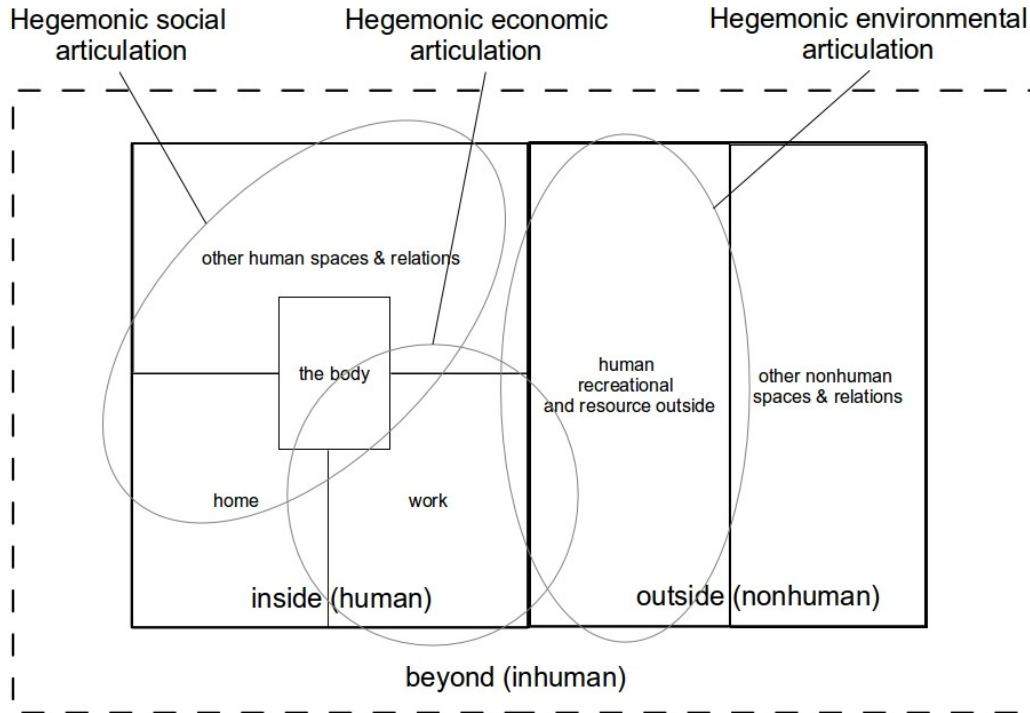


Figure 19. The environment, multiplied.

### Three's a Crowd

The simultaneous expansion, implosion, and multiplication of the environment into a space of ethical questions completes and radicalizes the unsettling expansions and multiplications of the economic and the social described earlier in this chapter. This is not a coincidence, and it points toward something that I have thus far left unspoken. While it is the case that the trio of economy, society, and environment can be said to constitute a hegemonic articulation; while each of the three categories are, indeed, widely constituted in ways that effectuate the powerful diagram of “Nature-Culture-Capital-State-Development” (chapter 4); and while it is true that all three categories were born at roughly the same time, as

products of a 19th century industrial capitalist modernity (chapter 1); the story is actually much more complicated. Speaking genealogically, the *trio itself* was not born until the beginning of the end of the twentieth century. Economy, society, and environment all circulated as keywords up to that point, and “economy and society” were already, at that time, joined quite closely as a key binary of modernity (see, for example, M. Weber 1978; Parsons and Smelser 1956). It was not until the early 1970s, however, that “the environment” truly shifted from a term of scientific discourse to a *political articulation* (Scheffer 1991; Pepper 1996; Gelobter et al. 2005). Indeed, one might say that it was a growing perception and experience of the crisis of the conditions of ecological well-being (for humans and others) that *produced the trio* by introducing a *third* (more-than-human) term to a conflict-ridden (human) binary. This third term has a domesticated hegemonic form, to be sure, but this is only one of its articulations. The other is “the ecological thought,” described above, and it threatens all of the categories to their core. The environment, in this sense, can be seen as a dangerous “third wheel” added to the old duo and then desperately (though perhaps unsuccessfully) tamed.

In *The Natural Contract*, Michel Serres describes a painting by Goya in which “a pair of enemies brandishing sticks is fighting in the midst of a patch of quicksand” (1995, 1). While our initial focus may be drawn to the combatants—the obvious “agents” of the image—this third party asserts itself. “We can identify a third position outside their squabble: the marsh into which the struggle is sinking” (Serres 1995, 1). This is the force, process, or relation that has come to be called “the environment,” something which appears among, between, and beneath the duo of economy and society to propose their potential end. Even if attempts have been

made to domesticate this third term—and indeed, the trio of sustainable development is exactly such an effort—its very existence remains a perpetual source of danger, since this term always risks breaking the entire configuration into an indefinite set of ethical questions about cause and effect, interdependence, and responsibility. The hegemonic trio, produced by the addition of the environment, is thus at once a marker of modernity's diagram of power and a (potential) gravestone marking its imminent end. If it is “the environment” which appears to mark the kinds of collective concerns that circulate at the emergence of what some have called “the anthropocene” (e.g., Crutzen 2002; Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill 2007; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010), this is not because the parochial (yet universalized) images of “nature” perpetuated by European colonizers have reached ascendancy in the collective consciousness, but rather because questions of interdependence and connection have undermined the viability of such images in favor of radical openings to the ethics of being-in-common (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010; Gibson-Graham 2011; Hill 2014).

### **Conclusion: Into the Fog Bank...**

If the complexity of the unsettling and multiplying moves I have described is itself unsettling, productive of more confusion than clarity, this is precisely the point. I have intended to show in this chapter that the hegemonic articulation of economy, society, and environment is only one particularly potent reality that co-exists with—and is, in fact, continually challenged and threatened by—a multiplicity of other intuitions, hesitations, cracks, and emergent articulations. These potential

openings are present even in the “heart” of hegemonic institutions and positions themselves, and suggest the possibility (however slim) of unexpected alliances—a rhizomic, transversal politics—that cuts across conventional lines of “environment versus economy” and other such divides. A wide array of pathways for political experimentation might open up with such an approach, and I will indicate some of these further in the conclusion of this thesis.

As this chapter closes, however, I wish to open up a challenging question that has increasingly haunted these pages. As each category is unsettled and multiplied, as “lines of flight” scatter in multiple directions, what remains of the economic, the social, and the environmental? What *should* remain? Eric, the regional development economist I have cited extensively above, suggested a provocative image for the trio: “We draw neat little Venn diagrams that imply that the boundaries are crisp and clean,” he told me in our interview, “but in fact it would probably be more accurate to say that you have *three fog-banks of different densities colliding with one another*” (interview 1, emphasis added). Economy, society, and environment are no longer stable domains with defined boundaries, but rather become diffused clouds of intensity, clusters of wild particles converging, mixing, combining, diverging. When fog banks collide, what is left of each bank? Are we not faced with a *single cloud*, a nebula, itself demarcated from the surrounding air only by diffuse gradients?

As I hope to have shown, the multiplication of *economy* blurs this domain from market exchange to human provisioning and into the indefinite zone of all that constitutes and sustains life. The multiplication of *society* blurs from a non-economic space of relation into the open question of interdependence—the very

place where the *environment* as “the ecological thought” also takes us. Economy becomes society becomes environment, and back again. Are we left with nothing but fog? Is there any point in re-drawing these lines? One could say, for example, that economy should be defined in its broadest sense as humanity’s “interchange with [its] natural and social environment, in so far as this results in supplying ... the means of material want satisfaction” (Polanyi 1992, 29, insert added). But why the line between the material and the immaterial? Since when has human need, which clearly includes more-than-material dimensions, been truly captured by such a distinction? Perhaps, then, economy should signify any activity or process that meets human needs, in whatever form. But where is this line drawn? Are geologic processes not then included? Is economy the space of human *agency* acting to meet these needs? Is an incapacitated elder receiving care from younger generations not then excluded from the economic? Have we returned to the social as the economic object? Such lines of questioning could go on, and could follow the threads of possible alternative articulations of the social and the environmental as well. In all of these cases, we will find ourselves continually both *inside* and *outside* the very categories we had been trying to define the others against, or only in relation to. It is a fog bank: environment becomes society becomes economy, and back again. The question of what to do in such a nebulous place—of what we might strategically make and re-make of this mess—is what the final part of this thesis will begin to pursue.



## Part IV

### (Re)composing Possibilities



## Chapter 7

# Ecopoiesis, Ethical Negotiation, and Strategies for (Re)composition

The shape of amodern [that is, non-modern] history will have a different geometry, not of progress, but of permanent and multi-patterned interaction through which lives and worlds get built, human and unhuman. (Haraway 1992, 304, insert added)

### Introduction: Emerging from the Fog-Bank

In the previous two chapters, I have attempted to show how a process of decomposition can help to amplify lines of flight by which the hegemonic trio of the economic, the social, and the environmental are continually becoming-undone and becoming-otherwise. Even in the discourses of Maine professionals most likely to invest themselves in hegemony, the trio and its elements can be found to waver, unravel, blur, fragment, multiply, and morph from a set of distinct forces and domains into a scene of colliding fog banks. The strength and stability of zombie categories is fundamentally challenged here, as the hegemonic monsters are not only figured as already-dead, but their once seemingly-pervasive and inevitable presence is also significantly diminished. Far from fully populating our world with their powers, they become one set of assemblages among others. While still dangerous and powerful, they are now surrounded by a proliferation of other figures, other forms of life, other assemblages with which we might compose transformative alliances. Indeed, the hegemonic trio appears to have very few adamant allies and more than a few detractors even among its professional

articulators. While fidelity to the economic, the social, and the environmental may be found in many public performances, private betrayals proliferate. How might this non-hegemonic cluster of becomings take more articulable, public forms as *counter*-hegemonic alliances and practices? This is the question which the remainder of this thesis will address.

My task, then, is to step into the space of converging fog banks and compose something new from the “continuum of intensities” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 70) into which the hegemonic trio is continually decomposed. It is crucial that this “fog bank” image not be reduced to one of simple blurring and confusion, to a mess that must be contained or cleaned up, and certainly not to an undifferentiated “whole” in which difference blurs into a seamless unity. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) provide a different figure for thinking and encountering this fog bank, noted briefly in chapter 2: the “body without organs” or “BwO” (1987, 153). Closely related to the “virtual” (chapter 4), the concept of the BwO allows us to refuse a reductive ontology of *being*, and the inevitability of whatever *is* in the world, in favor of an ontology of *becoming*—without, that is, also rejecting the possibility of new forms of stabilization. If “organs” are understood as discrete zones of organization and territorialization that render a body into an organism, an identity, or a subject, then the BwO is the virtual zone of endless becoming that simultaneously renders all forms of organization possible and continually threatens them to the core. The BwO is always *virtually* present at the heart of every assemblage, yet can never be encountered as such since its virtuality is always actualized in particular form.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, its presence forms the condition of possibility for the transformation

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<sup>67</sup> In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, it is “real without being actual” (1987, 94).

and becoming-otherwise of all assemblages. As a strategic ontological figure of thought, the BwO reminds us that the assemblages of the present are only one possible way that reality can be composed, and that other possibilities await actualization “below the surface,” so to speak, of any given formation.

If the fog bank of chapter 6 is viewed as a BwO, then it no longer has to appear as a zone of pure confusion, a space which might otherwise invoke the panic that so often accompanies radical destabilization.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, as much as Deleuze and Guattari would see the movement toward the BwO as a precondition of revolutionary transformation, the point is never to finally reach it or to dwell eternally in its movement of “absolute deterritorialization” (1987, 55). Rather to “become a body without organs” is to learn to continually experiment with what the presence of the BwO might enable to emerge anew. “Dismantling the organism,” they write, “has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity” (1987, 160). The fog bank as BwO thus designates a zone of virtual affirmation, a movement towards other possible modes of becoming, and a site for careful, collective experimentation. I say *careful* because—as I described in chapter 2 relative to the post-environmentalist, pro-capitalist work of Shellenberger and Nordhaus—there is nothing inherently liberating about the BwO. One must actively work to *craft* the new that emerges, and to side with some emergences over others. We need to move beyond (or, perhaps, more accurately *through*) the Nietzschean notion invoked in chapter 1 of

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68 A panic which may be one of the key ingredients in the emergence of fascism as a mode of security-seeking amidst experiences of chaos and breakdown. This is clearly something that a revolutionary politics must avoid, even while actively seeking to undo core elements of the present web of assemblages.

“pushing that which is falling”: if the categories of the hegemonic articulation are in crisis, and if our task is, in part, to amplify this crisis, then we must also be committed to the work of actively *affirming* (re)compositions that emerge from the space of dissolution (Braidotti 2013b).<sup>69</sup> What can be (re)composed from the fog bank? How might we follow fruitful lines of flight, connect with others along the way, hold on to just enough of the old that the new may be made more viable, and at the same time experiment with innovative articulations towards a new politics?<sup>70</sup>

In the pages that follow, I will widen the arc of the movement that animates this thesis. If the previous chapters shuttled back and forth between the voices of my interviewees, my own ethico-political commitments, and various strands of theory, one might visualize that in these final two chapters the space between such points of passage has increased, and thus the range of movement will become wider, the arc broader. At times I will leave the space of conversation with Maine's professionals—and even depart from immediate reference to Maine altogether—in order to elaborate particular concepts. At other times I will return to close engagements with interviews. In all cases, I will come home to Maine with what I have crafted, since it is *in* this place, and *for* this place (along with, as I will describe in chapter 9, its “shadow places”), that I am attempting to think and (re)compose.

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69 Rosi Braidotti's (2013b) notion of “affirmative politics” clarifies the strategy of “pushing that which is falling” as more than mere destruction, but as active *creation*. The collapse of modernity's categorical distinctions—symptomatic of a wider crisis of humanism—is an opportunity to be seized: “Instead of falling back on the sedimented habits of thought that the humanist past has institutionalized,” she suggests, “the posthuman predicament encourages us to undertake a leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our times” (2013b, 54).

70 I am paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari's “recipe” for transformative experimentation: “This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times” (1987, 161).

### *Steps Toward (Re)composition*

The compositional work of this chapter proceeds in four key steps. First, I re-describe the fog bank from a *process* perspective, as a site of ongoing struggle over the kinds of worlds that might (and do, in fact) emerge. I have previously referred to this in terms of the “articulation of assemblages” (chapters 1 and 3), but I will give it here the more precise name of *ecopoiesis*—the creation (*poiesis*) of habitat (*oikos*). The hegemonic trio can, in light of this concept, be “put in its place” not as an *a priori* starting point for collective struggle and imagination, but rather as one provisional and problematic attempt to compose habitats for humans and others. The second step of the chapter takes off from here: as chapters 5 and 6 have shown, there are *other* ways to compose habitat that continually escape capture by the hegemonic trio, and these can be described broadly in terms of multiple, situated *ethical negotiations* of interdependence. I mobilize J.K. Gibson-Graham's notion of “community economy” to flesh out this description, showing such negotiation at play in the work of a number of my interviewees in Maine. Faced with such an open space of negotiation, I arrive at a third step, in the form of strategic questions: How to participate in a different kind of *ecopoiesis*? How to use language to articulate and thus connect multiple forms of ethical negotiation in a way that might constitute a new *politics*? Can the hegemonic articulation of these categories be severed, their linguistic resonance maintained, and their content radically transformed? Or are there other crucial strategies to pursue involving the creation and mobilisation of new terms and categories? While Gibson-Graham answers this question by radically re-signifying “economy,” I argue for an experimental approach that moves beyond re-workings of the hegemonic categories. I conclude with an

opening toward new articulations, prompted by a particular interviewee and her framing of “quality of life” in radically transversal terms.

### **Ecopoiesis: Composing Habitats and Inhabitants**

Let us face the fog bank once again. To experience the dissolution of categorical domains into a space of molecular becoming—a space of the very question of how we might live together and who “we,” in fact might be or become—is to be definitively reminded that there is no economy, society, or environment to be negotiated or struggled over unless and to the extent that these categories have been *produced* as components of a particular assemblage. I have not intended, in this thesis, to imply that the hegemonic trio is “actually” false, non-existent, or unimportant, but rather that it must be seen as one constellation of (particularly powerful) articulations among many that are continually emerging and coming-undone relative to a virtual zone of potential. One cannot fix economy, society, or environment as foundational structures within which contingencies play out, and nor can one simply place their composition in a past era from which we have inherited their singular durability. They are made continually, they are made multiply, and they are always becoming-otherwise. They are, so to speak, provisional *strategic moves* in negotiation processes rather than pre-existing spaces in which negotiations unfold.

This was consistently apparent in my interviews, even if not always acknowledged explicitly by interviewees: in practice, economy, society, and environment—in their various forms—must be produced, stabilized, packaged,



circulated, and indeed *fought for* in processes of regional development and change. I presented examples of this in chapter 5: Kathleen, the statistician, proposing that the economy is “all just sort of concepts and it works because everybody's bought in to this concept” (interview 5), thus implying that his very work of collecting and presenting statistics, generating images and metaphors, and answering questions about “how the economy is doing” is a key part of producing its reality as such; Fred, the community development director, expressing the same implication in his discussion of the composition of “the social” through particular “lenses” such as his organization's “social impact tool” (interview 34); and Dana, the environmental advocacy nonprofit director, describing the term “environment” as a strategic “catch-all” designed to connect multiple, otherwise disparate issues (interview 25). When one advocates for economy, society, or environment, it is not a struggle on behalf of already-unified domains but rather a struggle *to compose such domains* as unities. One does not begin with the categories of the trio, but rather *ends up* with them if (and only if) a particular articulatory process is successful. Economy, society, and environment are, in fact, particular ways of *composing habitat(s)* for (certain) humans and for more-than-human others.

While I have thus far used the language of the “articulation of assemblages” to designate processes of composition, I can now speak more precisely and name the process by which particular modes of life are actualized from the fog-bank as *ecopoiesis*.<sup>71</sup> The *eco* is derived from the Greek *oikos*, variously translated as “house,”

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71 The term “ecopoiesis” has been used previously in two fairly unrelated ways, neither of which have significantly informed my usage. First, in ecological literary theory, the term has been used to refer to the disclosure of the more-than-human world by writing (Rigby 2004). Secondly, it has been used (perhaps earlier) by Robert Haynes (1990) to refer to the process of “terraforming” other planets into habitable worlds for human colonization. While the political and ethical spirit of my (quite different) conceptualization resonates more with the former usage, the substantive engagement with the question of habitat composition places me much closer to the latter despite my profound reservations about the hubris entailed in such geoengineering schemes.

“household,” or “habitat,” and serves as the common root of both economy and ecology. The term *poiesis* (also from the Greek) refers to the ongoing making of worlds, the process of “creation and ontological genesis” (Castoriadis 1998, 3). Eco-poiesis does not name a “system dynamic” in the manner, for example, of Maturana and Varela’s notion of “autopoiesis,” in which porously-bounded dynamic living systems transform flows of energy, matter, and meaning to continually produce and conserve their own internal organization (Varela, Maturana, and Uribe 1974; Maturana and Varela 1980; Maturana 2002).<sup>72</sup> There are, in fact, no “ecopoietic systems,” but there is an eco-poiesis *from which all systems—and their failures—emerge*. Eco-poiesis is characterized neither by boundaries or their absence, for it is the very *question* of the composition of such closing and opening that it seeks to address. It thus aims to continually shift the emphasis from product to process, and to the potentials that processes of creation might open. To further clarify this intent, it is crucial to elaborate the notion of *oikos* (habitat).

If *poiesis* is about creative *becoming*, then *oikos* is about *belonging*.<sup>73</sup>

Eco-poiesis is the becoming of belonging.<sup>74</sup> This belonging, this notion of habitat,

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72 Beth Dempster (2007) has offered an important challenge and supplement to Maturana and Varela’s concept of autopoiesis that resonates significantly with my project here. Complex systems, she argues, are dynamical and agential well beyond the boundaries of the *auto*. What she calls “sym-poiesis”—literally, collective creation—is intended to name a contrasting system dynamic. Where autopoiesis names an organizational closure (the “organism”) that is conserved via a selectively-open flow, sym-poiesis refers to systems that are “*organizationally ajar and boundaryless*” (Dempster 2007, 103, emphasis in original), composed of multiple, relatively fluid elements in ever-changing relations which cannot be captured by any clear distinction between a “self” and an “other.” Crucial here, in particular, is Dempster’s challenge to the “environment” distinction present in autopoiesis theory and her rendering of open relationality as central to world-making. Eco-poiesis has a different aim, however, in that it is not intended to name a “system” dynamic at all, but rather the processes by which systematicity as such emerges.

73 I am grateful to my father, William Miller, for offering this formulation in a conversation about the eco-poiesis concept.

74 “Belonging” is a complex term, and can easily be posed in problematic terms. I intend it here in a radically open and exploratory sense that avoids any claims to universalist, essentialist, or even place-bound notions of community. Emily O’Gorman expresses this clearly: “While belonging

should not be confused with anything resembling an external “environment,” a passive “context,” a fixed locale or resource pool, or a community consisting of a stable essence. Habitat, as I intend it here, names the web of constitutive interrelationships from which assemblages—communities, regions, institutions, concepts, families, individuals, etc.—emerge as singularities and which these assemblages, in turn, participate in composing. “Living beings,” writes Brett Buchanan, “do not simply ‘have’ milieus as a location in which they live, but *are* a composition of these milieus” (2008, 175).

Contrary to some of its common mobilizations in ecological science (e.g., Odum 1971; Kearney 2006; Yahner 2012), I conceptualize habitat not as a location-specific category but a *relational* one.<sup>75</sup> Neither simply the collection of resources that an entity needs for sustenance, nor just the active production of a “niche” (Odling-Smee 1996; Odling-Smee, Laland, and Feldman 2003), habitat names the ongoing, simultaneous emergence of the *inhabitant* and that which it *inhabits*, the subjects and the objects of sustenance, the site of agency and its context for enactment. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, we “cease to be subjects [and] become *events*, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life ... Climate, wind, season, hour are not of another nature than the

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has been taken up in ways that promote essentialist categories of inclusion and exclusion, and that disguise specific relationships, the promise of this concept is that its emphasis on fit might be usefully reimagined to provide insight into contested spaces of biocultural relationships; how they are created and contested and with what consequences for whom?” (2014, 286).

75 There is a tension in ecology between place-bound notions of habitat and those that center more on the general sustenance “needs” of organisms or populations. On one side, we have Odum's simple definition of habitat as “the place where an organism lives, or the place where one would go to find it” (1971, 234). On the other hand, we have Krausman (for example) insisting that “habitat quality should be linked with demographics, not vegetative features” (1999, 89), and thus that “wherever an organism is provided with resources that allow it to survive, that is habitat” (1999, 86). I intend here to push the organism-centered definition of habitat to a more relational register (out of the zone of living beings in a world of passive resources) while retaining its insight that habitat should not be conflated with location or place.

things, animals, or people that populate them, follow them, sleep and awaken within them” (1987, 263).

It is important not to render this interdependence of habitat and inhabitant in terms of a simple unity or even a co-determination. The relation is much more complex, and thus difficult to describe and to think: In one sense, “we” are nothing but the ongoing, emergent effect of particular actualizations of an *oikos*. As Latour writes: “What would a human be without elephants, plants, lions, cereals, oceans, ozone or plankton? A human alone, much more alone even than Robinson Crusoe on his island. Less than a human. Certainly not a human” (1998, 230). Yet, at the same time, particular habitats make possible new forms of identity and action. An emergent assemblage thus becomes active *in* and *as* its own habitat, participating in the very relations that make this participation possible, and at times (sometimes radically) transforming them. The hegemonic trio, as one constellation of ecopoietic articulations, at once makes us who we (partly) are and presides over the emergence of particular forms of agency, subjectivity, and imagination that (again, in part) continually affirm and sustain this habitat. At the same time, other emergent articulations continually compose *other* forms of life, lines of flight, that might participate in composing *other* habitats and thus *other* modes of poietic belonging.

This notion of *oikos* shares some affinities with Jacob von Uexküll's early twentieth-century concept of the *umvelt* (see Uexküll 2010), which has seen a recent revival among biosemioticians (e.g., Deely 2004; Tønnessen 2009; Kull 2010; Ferreira and Caldas 2013). Uexküll's ambition was to shift from a biology which viewed organisms as machine-like objects to be studied from the “outside,” towards a “biology of subjects” (A. Weber 2010) in which living beings would be understood to co-compose their own worlds of significance. The *umwelt* is the totality of that

which a living subject perceives and produces (Uexküll 2010, 42), the habitat within which they find themselves, which constitutes their sphere of agency, and which they, in turn, continually construct. The *poiesis* of *umwelt* is not just a matter of perception, but unfolds via a double “pincer movement” between the ascription of meaning and the enactment of material effects (Uexküll 2010, 48–49). The structure of the eye and the visualizations it is capable of producing, for example, are just as crucial as the significance such effects are given by perception. Each organism—and more importantly for Uexküll, each species—composes its own unique *umwelt* within which life unfolds. *Umwelt*, like *oikos*, is entirely relative to that which composes it and is, in turn, composed by it. This is a radical inversion of the notion of an “external environment,” where externality is now constituted only in relation to a particular, embodied subjective center. There are as many environments as there are beings capable of engaging and composing meaningful worlds.

Uexküll's formulation is more than a challenge to mechanistic biology, as it also poses a radical alternative to a fundamental articulation of modernity: the notion of a *single world*, what Uexküll calls “the fiction of an all-encompassing world-space” (2010, 70). There is, in his view, neither a unified reality “behind” subjective impressions, nor a single world that might at some point be composed. The notion of a unified “household” within which all beings dwell is rejected, and the ontological rug is pulled out from under any formulation that would enable an economy, a society, an environment, or any other articulation to appear as the foundational “context” within which world-making negotiations must occur. I follow Uexküll here in proposing that there can be no single *oikos*. There are, rather, *oikoi* (plural), and one can only engage the question of habitat from the perspective of the inhabitants which it co-composes.

I diverge from Uexküll, however, on two key fronts. First, as an unrepentant Kantian (Deely 2004), Uexküll maintains a strong divide between the subjective and the objective, and poses a world of inaccessible and passively-constitutive objects as distinct from worlds of action and meaning. “The object only takes part in ... action,” he writes, “to the extent that it must possess the necessary properties [to enable this action]” (2010, 49, inserts added). In my concept of *oikos*, I refuse such a distinction. I do not know what “objects” can or cannot do, where the line between subjects and objects—if any—might lie, and what active role nonliving entities might play in the action of world-making. I resonate with the “vital materialism” of Jane Bennett (2010), in which the “pluriverse is traversed by heterogeneities that are continually doing things,” and which seeks to “chasten ... fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests” (2010, 122). The negotiation that is the *poiesis* of habitat is never simply an act of subjects upon objects, but rather the very materialization of such a possibility in and through an agential field of forces that is always not-yet fully decided.

My second divergence (in this case more qualified than the first) is in regard to the relation between *umwelten*. At some key moments in Uexküll's work, subjective worlds are constituted in fundamental isolation from one another, each *umwelt* constituting a kind of self-enclosed phenomenological sphere cut off from access to a noumenal world beyond. A key image in his work is that of a soap bubble: “The birds that flutter about, the squirrels hopping from branch to branch, or the cows grazing in the meadow, all remain permanently enclosed in the bubble that encloses their space” (Uexküll 2010, 69). While these bubbles can co-exist in the same objective space—for example, in a field in which flowers (as objects) can enter

into multiple *umwelten* in distinct and incommensurate ways—they cannot fundamentally overlap or meet. Each being, each species, is cut off from others by a wall of subjectivity, and we thus move from the modernist image of a single world to an (also modernist?) image of a proliferation of isolated worlds that cannot communicate.

Deleuze and Guattari, who draw on Uexküll in a variety of ways, counter this isolationist tendency by highlighting and transforming another of the biologist's images: *umwelten* as relational compositions of *point and counterpoint* (Uexküll 2010, 190). Invoking a musical metaphor, Uexküll unravels his own soap bubble image by proposing a mode of inter-*umwelten* “communication” in the form of a dynamic, embodied evolutionary dance between mutually co-constitutive beings: “The fly-likeness of the spider means that it has taken up certain motifs of the fly melody in its bodily composition” (Uexküll 2010, 191). In the hands of Deleuze and Guattari, this means that *umwelten* are never isolated but in fact are always emergent in/as processes of inter-becoming (1987, 314). Habitat is composed relationally *as* the habitat of a particular being, a species, a community (or any other singularity), but also via the ways in which this being is continually territorialized and deterritorialized in relation with other beings and other habitats. Ecopoiesis is never the *poiesis* of a single *oikos*, but rather the ongoing, negotiated, agonistic co-composition of multiple habitats and their inhabitants in relation to one another.

On some level, many of my interviewees already know this: processes of regional development, social advocacy, and environmental protection in Maine are never simply about the categories, communities, or beings on which they claim to focus. Economic development proposals immediately become struggles over the

habitat compositions of various humans and nonhumans alike. Calvin, an economic development think-tank director, described his ire at the way that a turtle and its human allies intervened in a railroad redevelopment project: “The argument ultimately boiled down to a single turtle species that somehow only existed on the whole planet in that particular bog. So \$500,000 was spent to literally capture and tag and monitor every one of those turtles for like a year and a half” (interview 4). Oscar, the regional planning director, proposed that economic development will always include questions of nonhuman species and their well-being: “there’s always a constituency for that [little endangered frog]” (interview 13). Indeed, “economic” developers continually (often to their chagrin) navigate and intervene in the dynamics of wetland hydrology, songbird nesting, predator ranges, climate regulation, and more. Social workers, meanwhile, confront questions around the importance of companion species, the need to expose children to the “natural world,” and the ways in which the sustenance of some Maine people depends on the well-being of the deer they hunt for food. Environmentalists seeking to advocate for human recreational opportunities are already bound up in caring for the habitats of multiple beings that constitute their “environment,” and even those seeking to enact non-instrumental solidarity with nonhuman species always find themselves in the midst of struggles over the habitats of fellow humans.

### *Ecopoiesis Beyond the Trio*

What difference, in practice, does the concept of ecopoiesis intend to make? First and foremost, it serves as conceptual tool to bring focus to the *processes* of composing habitat without already deciding on their outcomes (e.g., economy,



society, and environment). It thus names, in one sense, the space of “ontological politics” (A. Mol 1998) where the materialization of habitat plays out—the myriad practices of language, representation, corporeal expression and assembly, quantitative and qualitative transformation, adaptive and dynamic response, and evolutionary negotiation that compose the *oikoi* of particular beings and communities.<sup>76</sup> Returning to my interviews in Maine, I can re-read the both the hesitations and uncertainties expressed by my interviewees and their conscious acknowledgements of the contingent construction of categories (chapter 5) as sites of ecopoietic opening and contestation. Far from simply being “economic developers,” “social workers,” and “environmental advocates,” my interviewees are active agents in ecopoiesis, composing and decomposing various forms of habitat that are not wholly reducible to the hegemonic trio. What kinds of conversations and transformations might open if they were to recognize themselves as habitat-makers, as people participating not only in responding to the dynamics of pre-existing domains, but in fact working (along with many other forces) to produce particular habitats in which particular forms of life are enabled and others rendered impossible?

This question points toward a second implication of ecopoiesis. The problem-space of the hegemonic trio and the modern diagram of power constrains us to the work of developing “practical solutions” to apparent challenges, the nature of which remain themselves unchallenged. There is a field of *practicality* that corresponds to the field of *hegemony*, and this renders a whole host of possibilities apparently “impractical.” The perspective of ecopoiesis would challenge us to ask

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<sup>76</sup> The elaboration of these and other dimensions is crucial, but lies beyond the scope of this project.

about the very conditions of possibility that undergird a given problem-space and its practical solutions. What possibilities and new forms of practicality might a different *oikos* one day make possible? Ecopoiesis here serves as a tool for sensitizing us to the ethico-political stakes of what Isabelle Stengers calls an “etho-ecology” (2005a; 2005b; 2010). For Stengers, one cannot separate the *ethos*, “the way of behaving particular to a being” from this being’s *oikos*, “the habitat of that being and the way in which that habitat satisfies or opposes the demands associated with the ethos or affords opportunities for an original ethos to risk itself” (2005b, 997).<sup>77</sup>

If Maine’s professionals cannot wholly break out of the hegemonic formation they also resist, this is not simply because of a lack of “will,” of “consciousness,” or of “courage” on their part, but because the particular etho-ecology within which they subsist has rendered deviations from hegemony profoundly difficult. One would have to risk what one *is*—and thus risk a certain form of extinction—to go against one’s habitat. The political question, then, becomes not simply that of cultivating courage and dissent but also of *constituting different habitats* in which other forms of action and relation become ever more possible. This entails experimentation with transformations of both inhabitants and habitats, engaging the generative capacities of co-habitation, of the question of what particular relationalities can *do*: “We can never know,” writes Stengers, echoing Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza (Deleuze 1988b; 1990), “what a being is capable of or can become capable of” (2005b, 997). And neither can we know what a habitat is capable of being or becoming. Focusing on the becoming of various modes of belonging, on

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77 One must simultaneously connect the habitat with the inhabitant as parts of a single etho-ecology while also remaining uncertain to what both might become as these relations are transformed. “Inseparability does not necessarily mean dependence,” Stengers reminds us (2005b, 997). The relative autonomy that emerges from a given habitat is a force of creation that is never determined by that habitat even as it is made by/of it, and transformation of habitat relations may generate unpredictable creative (un)becomings of their inhabitants.

ecopoiesis and its constitutive effects, is a way of sustaining an attunement and attentiveness not only to that which sustains “us” (whoever that may be), but also to that which we have not yet become and to the always-emerging conditions of possibility for cultivating such becoming.

Ecopoiesis, finally, enables a crucial and related move in the realm of critical and performative scholarship. In chapter 2, I briefly described the work of various scholars to trace the production of particular hegemonic categories. Çaliskan and Callon's efforts (2009; 2010) are a prime example: their “economization” approach seeks to trace “the processes through which behaviors, organizations, institutions and, more generally, objects are constituted as being ‘economic’” (Çaliskan and Callon 2010, 2). Others have applied similar approaches—often drawing on Foucault's genealogical strategies—to trace what might be called “socialization” and “environmentalization”.<sup>78</sup> As I hope to have demonstrated, these are crucial interventions that enable us to challenge the seeming-inevitability and self-evidence of hegemonic categories and thus open space for their contestation and transformation. Michel Callon, for one, certainly intends for his work to help “produce the conditions in which new emerging forces are offered the possibility of becoming stronger [and] to limit the grip of established forces” (2005, 18). Yet the tracing of hegemonic categories as processes of composition runs a profound risk: by focusing on economy, society, and environment—even as verbs rather than nouns—such approaches may performatively re-affirm that which they purport to call into question. “We must ask ourselves,” cautions Foucault with regard to all such genealogical strategies, “what purpose is ultimately served by this suspension

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78 See citations of these literatures in chapter 2, fn. 27.

of all the accepted unities, if, in the end, we return to the unities that we pretended to question at the outset” (2007b, 28).

In seeking an “economy,” for example, the economization approach will always find one. Or it will find many. In either case, it risks tacitly reinforcing the problematic assumption that the composition of habitat does (and perhaps must) take the ultimate form of an “economy.” This is clearly not the case.<sup>79</sup> The key to fulfilling the transformative aspirations of such genealogical approaches, I believe, is to remain vigilantly clear that economization, socialization, and environmentalization are only particular and partial *instances* of an *ecopoiesis* which always exceeds them. This is distinct from Callon's (1998b) argument that economization proceeds by a “framing and overflowing,” elaborated in chapter 4. *Ecopoiesis* draws attention not to the constitutive overflow *of* the frame, but rather toward the virtual molecularities and the actualized becomings—otherwise that escape the frame/overflow system altogether. It is to recognize—and to encourage a vigilance in remembering—that there are always multiple articulations of collective life that escape the grip of the hegemonic formations that genealogy traces, and even more articulations “waiting,” virtually, to be actualized. It is only via a sensitivity to such lines of flight that we will be able to craft conscious strategies for escaping zombie categories and composing something radically different.

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<sup>79</sup> Portions of this argument have been previously published in Miller (2014), and are further (and also differently) elaborated there.

## Ethical Negotiation(s)

What, then, are these lines of flight and what might we make of them? This much should be clear: standing amidst the fog bank of colliding intensities, in the space where the voices of Maine professionals fracture, multiply, and dissolve the hegemonic categories, I have encountered a set of diverse and complex ethico-political questions about what it means to be alive with others, to whom we are connected and to whom we are responsible, what such responsibility might mean, and who this “we,” in fact, *is* and might *become*. To reiterate the powerful summary offered by the environmental nonprofit director, Paula: “Fundamentally what I think we’re trying to do is figure out how we’re going to share this planet together, and what are going to be the rules of the game” (interview 26). Far from being the place where all meaning is lost, where differences are dissolved, and where possibilities end, the fog bank is a space in which everything (potentially) multiplies and opens. Recalling the multiplications of chapter 6 that expanded ever-outward, we find that at the “end” of economy we arrive at the broad and open question of that which sustains human and more-than-human life (Oscar, interview 13; Dorothy, interview 30); the “end” of the social arrives at the ethical question of our interdependence with others and its implications (“What is our interconnectedness?,” asked Brenda the social researcher, interview 31); and the “end” of the environmental carries us to this very same interconnectedness only placed into a context well beyond the domain of the human and rendered radically contingent and complex (Greg, interview 15).

Indeed, when the hegemonic trio is fractured, expanded, and dissolved into the fog-bank, what remains is not a zone of confusion, but a proliferation of specific

ethical questions and struggles. The articulation of economy, society, and environment, in fact, often serves only to contain, domesticate, or reduce this proliferation. From a thousand complex and rhizomic negotiations that would otherwise escape and challenge conventional political framings, we simply end up, for example, with “economy versus environment.” In terms drawn from conservation biology, this could be called “habitat simplification” (Carroll and Fox 2008) in the sense that it reduces the space in which diverse articulations might flourish, threatens to render some practices extinct, and opens up spaces for new forms of colonization. Such simplification is never wholly successful, and in fact (as I have intended to show in chapter 4), relies on the active suppression of diversity which it nonetheless depends upon. As my interviewees already know, despite their ongoing capture by the hegemonic categories, there are myriad other struggles unfolding below, behind, and alongside the molar simplifications of economy, society, and environment.

What are these struggles? They are negotiations over specific attachments between humans and other species, humans and particular forms of life and habit, humans and particular places; over different frames and experiences of time; over different desires and aspirations; over clashing values and regimes of care; over questions of measurement and (in)commensurability; over which constituencies may appear as legitimate participants in a given struggle; over the structure and implementation of decision-making processes; over different “geographies of responsibility” (Massey 2004), the scope and scale of the places people are ethically connected with; over clashing notions of causality and connection; over languages and styles of articulation; over differential power relations composed my multiple

patterns of inequality and oppression. And there are more. I will illustrate and elaborate a number of these in chapter 9, in the context of specifying the notion of “livelihoods.” For now, it is sufficient to say that amidst this proliferation we leave the space of the hegemonic articulation and enter the space of *ethical negotiation*.

### *Ethical Negotiation and “Community Economy”*

I define “ethical negotiation” as all of the ways in which questions of belonging—of the composition and co-existence of habitats and their inhabitants—are negotiated, struggled over, and provisionally answered (for better or worse) by vulnerable, mutually-exposed beings. I draw this term specifically from the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham and her elaboration of the concept of “community economy” (2005a; 2005b; 2006a). Despite its construction from two keywords that I have thus far associated with the hegemonic assemblage, community economy in the hands of Gibson-Graham and her collaborators is a radical resignification, a transversal articulation that cuts across and through the conventional categories it invokes. First, the term “economy” here does not signify a domain, a system, or a force, but rather an open and contested site “emptied of any essential identity, logic, organizing principle or determinant” (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003, 125). Stretched as far as the term can go without breaking entirely, “economy” becomes little more than the site of struggle over the *question* of how collective and individual life is—and might be—sustained. “Community,” then, refers to the “sociality and interdependence” (2006a, 83) in and through which such sustenance takes place. Gibson-Graham resists the positive determinations—essence, identity,

locality, shared values, or traditions—that are often associated with community, drawing instead on Jean-Luc Nancy's theorization of an “inoperative community” (1991), a minimal ontological “being-in-common” that refuses reduction to a “common-being.” Community is nothing more or less than the exposure of beings to each other and to each others' finitude, the inescapable sociality that precedes and renders possible all being.<sup>80</sup>

*Community economy* is the “ethical negotiation” of livelihood amidst the “the sociality of all relations” (2006a, 82).<sup>81</sup> More verb than noun, it names the specificities of dynamic encounter through which myriad interdependent beings negotiate the appropriation, production, circulation, and use of the means of life—the fraught, fragile, and fertile “commerce of being-in-common” (Nancy 2000, 74; quoted in Gibson-Graham 2006a, 88). Exactly how this negotiation is to be accomplished cannot be specified beforehand; only the dynamic of negotiation itself can be named. As Gibson-Graham describes, “what interdependence might mean, how it might look in any particular setting ... are not questions [we] can answer in the abstract” (2005b, 121). Community economy is a vague and open term because it names that which can never be generalized: the particular, local, “minor” (Deleuze

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80 To propose a shared essence of community, in Nancy's view, would be to merge all beings into each other and thus render sociality itself impossible, since being-with requires that we are also separated or “spaced” (Nancy 1991, 76). It is, perhaps paradoxically, the irreducible differences between us that enable us to touch.

81 It is important to be clear that community economy extends well beyond the boundaries of the human (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010; Gibson-Graham 2014; Hill 2014; Gibson-Graham and Miller). Negotiation includes the more-than-human world, the nonhuman “others that make life possible and shape the character of life (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009, 149). Ann Hill's work, in particular, seeks to “undo our human exceptionalism as ethical actors” (Hill 2014, 222). For Hill, it is crucial that we begin to robustly explore ways of engaging ethics that shift from the conventional human subject-of-action to what she refers to as “human-nonhuman ethical assemblages” (2014, 198), or, perhaps even more suggestively, the “ethical agency of a more-than-subject” (2014, 217).



and Guattari 1987, 105) negotiations of collective life that escape full capture by the hegemonic trio.

This specificity is what Nora, an environmental nonprofit researcher, intuited when she told me that the environment can never be reduced to one thing because “there are lots of environments”; and, moreover, she said, “I’m not sure there’s just one economy, either” (interview 22). Nora saw, instead, a multiplicity of distinctions and dynamics: not only does it depend on the locality and the specific actors involved, but “there’s short-term and long-term. There’s with externalities, without externalities. There’s direct and indirect costs. ... there’s going to be a different answer based on whose ox is being gored” (interview 22). Is building a pipeline to transport Canadian tar sands oil through southern Maine (Benzak and Droitsch 2012) good for “the economy?” asked Nora. It is good for the bottom-line of some, and potentially destructive to the livelihoods of many others: “it’s a question of winners and losers” (interview 22). “Economy” does little more, from this minoritizing perspective, than cover up the specificities of ethical negotiation.

While the formulation of community economy may be purposefully open, it is by no means a neutral description. At the core of Gibson-Graham’s articulation of community economy is a what can be called a “meta-normative” ethical demand: the *exposure of exposure*, the imperative to render-explicit the contours and stakes of the already-present being-in-common with others that makes our lives possible (E. Miller 2013, 253). Gibson-Graham resists any kind of specified *morality*—a list of specific things that we all “should” do or be—while at the same time calling for a commitment to the ongoing opening of *ethical* negotiation.<sup>82</sup> There is, in particular,

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<sup>82</sup> I described this notion of ethics in chapter 6 as “an agonistic space of negotiation over the very meaning and contours of the in-common” (Popke 2009, 18).

“a truly salient distinction ... between whether interdependence is *recognized and acted upon* or whether it is *obscured or perhaps denied*” (2006a, 84, emphasis added).<sup>83</sup>

Community economy names, therefore, not simply any space of interdependence and interaction, but specifically those spaces in which the ethical dynamics of sociality have in some way been opened for negotiation, contestation, and transformation. How will we live together? Who counts as part of the in-common that “we” are composing and that, in turn, composes this “we”? What relations are rendered invisible or seemingly-immune to contestation and change, and what relations are enabled to become sites of creative experimentation and articulation? Community economy is the mutual exposure of/to such questions.

By “exposure,” I do not mean to imply a privileged access to an underlying “reality” (*the Truth, at last, revealed!*), but rather I draw on the word's other valences: the way one is exposed to new events or experiences, exposed to the queries and demands of others, or perhaps even exposed to harsh weather (one can even *die of exposure*). Exposure is not revelation, but *vulnerability*—the becoming-open that might ultimately force one to become otherwise. It is the very opposite of what Isabelle Stengers calls “anesthetics” (2005b, 997), that is, the composition of an *oikos* in which encounters that might render one vulnerable to transformation are cut off through various modes of distancing.<sup>84</sup> Ethical negotiation is about exposure

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83 Jean-Luc Nancy, from whom Gibson-Graham draws, describes this difference in terms of the “socially imploded generality” (1991, 74) of capitalist relations that institute a common-being (commensurability and exchange value) over and above that which cannot be measured or compared; and the “socially exposed particularity” (1991, 74) of a community that refuses, resists, or escapes such colonization.

84 Stengers illustrates this notion with the example of animal experimentation. Rather than moralizing about this issue, she wants to ask questions about the kinds of assemblages that render certain relations immune to ethical encounter and also speculate about what new assemblages might reverse this process: “We don't know what a researcher who today affirms the legitimacy or even the necessity of experiments on animals is capable of becoming in an *oikos* that demands that he or she think 'in the presence of' the victims of his or her decision” (Stengers 2005b, 997).

in the sense of an anti-anesthetics, the ongoing composition of etho-ecologies that refuse easy closures, majoritarian generalizations, and categorical pre-determinations.<sup>85</sup> It is in this sense that ethical negotiation names a whole array of ecopoietic relations and dynamics beyond the major molarities (see chapter 1) of economy, society, and environment. These are dynamics that some of my interviewees are already engaging.

Harriet, for example, director of a statewide rural development network, described her “economic development” work in terms of a grassroots, democratic process—an ethical praxis. “We want the community to own the economy, if that’s possible,” she said, at the same time refusing to give this “economy” any systemic integrity. For her, development cannot mean the alignment of community strategy with the demands of an “economy,” but must be a process through which “the community decide[s] what it wants to accomplish, and then you try and figure out how can we gauge where we are now and where we should go” (interview 14). Harriet and her co-workers are not compelled by a demand for competition or for more jobs at all costs: “It is about jobs, or is it about well-being and sufficient wherewithal to take care of yourself? What would you rather have—more jobs, or enough where you can enjoy your life?” (interview 14). She did not suggest that anything is possible, but rather shifted the emphasis of action from pre-determination by constraints to an exploration of possibilities based on democratically-articulated need and vision—on ethical negotiation. If the economic

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85 Community economy is, one might say, the *radical democratization of negotiation* in the sense of “radical democracy” as developed by theorists such as Cornelius Castoriadis (1991; 1998), Chantal Mouffe (1992; 2000; 2005), Ernesto Laclau (2005; 1990; Laclau and Mouffe 2001), Simon Critchley (2007), and William Connolly (1995; 2002; 2005). Despite their differences, these scholars all seek to articulate a politics in which neither the subjects nor objects of democratic struggle are pre-determined, and in which contingency and contestability remain at the core of all processes of institution.

has been hegemonically associated with a singular notion of quantitative “value,” it now becomes the space of *values* (broadly understood) where individual and collective needs and aspirations are brought together in the form of collaborations or clashes. “There *is* conflict,” said Dana, director of an environmental nonprofit, but she suggested that it is not between an “environment” and an “economy” *per se*. It is, rather, “between different values and priorities” (interview 25). It is between, we might say, multiple ecopoietic articulations of ethical livelihood.

*“Breaking the Golden Orbs of Value”*

Gibson-Graham's radical theorization of community economy calls for a radical democratization of ecopoiesis, the creation of “acknowledged space[s] of social interdependency and self-formation. ... unmapped and uncertain terrain[s] that call forth exploratory conversation and political/ethical acts of decision” (2006a, 166). Such an approach was exemplified by an interviewee whom I have refrained from discussing thus far because her discourse and work continually challenged and escaped even a “multiplication” of hegemonic categories.

At the time of our interview, Irene was working for a statewide conservation organization, but her previous work included a significant stint in state government where she served—effectively, even if not officially—as a mediator, a *negotiator*, between parties involved in classic “economy vs. environment” conflicts. For Irene, the core categories of the hegemonic articulation had little or no purchase: “For me, it isn't ... I don't think 'economy, community, and environment.' It's my *life*. These are the things I care about, and they all mean a lot to me and I try to hold them all

together at the same time when I do my work” (interview 16). It may be the case, suggested Irene, that people involved in various conflicts accept these categories and mobilize them in the process, but this is often only a problematic diversion from the crucial work of creative and transformative engagement. Responding affirmatively to my suggestion that the categories are frequently used to appeal to “laws of nature” (in various forms), Irene elaborated:

People will use the economy as this sacred thing to close down a conversation, 'Oh we can't do that.' And likewise, the environmental community says, 'Oh we can't do that, it would hurt the environment.' And those are like these golden orbs of values that we can't hurt. That's the language. ... We have affinity to one or the other, more than the other. ... [But] if we can avoid, at the outset, putting up one of those golden orbs of value, and focus less on the great value of the environment or the economy, not immediately say, 'Well, this is about the environment, and this is about the economy,' but [instead] sort of like: *'Here's a problem, what should we do about it?'* (interview 16, emphasis and inserts added)

Irene described her approach in detail, recounting numerous stories in which she had played a role as a key convener and facilitator of negotiation.<sup>86</sup> In each case, a set of complex actors was in play: developers, corporations, employees of corporations, local citizens, scientists, conservationists, radical ecology activists, nonhuman species, tools of measurement, geological configurations, water currents, storm patterns, ecosystemic interdependencies, town governments, state regulations and regulators, tax codes, fossil fuel dependencies and consumption patterns, and more. In each case, Irene was interested in opening up questions about the actual needs and aspirations of all parties in ways that refused easy reductions to the hegemonic categories: “I hope you see a pattern here,” she said after a

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<sup>86</sup> As rich as these stories are, I am not able to describe any one of them in detail, as this would risk compromising my commitment to anonymity. This limitation does not, thankfully, undermine my ability to make the argument I am focused on here, as it is more about the broad dynamics and approach of negotiation than about the (quite interesting and informative) details of how they unfold in a particular moment and site.

number of stories, “You’re listening to what the community *needs*, and how can you... Is there a way to meet *their needs and yours*?” (interview 16, emphasis in original).

“Need,” in this case, does not mean articulations of generic slogans such as “economic growth” or “environmental protection,” but rather the particular, detailed, and complex needs of people and institutions at a specific moment and in specific places: *this species’ habitat*, *this person’s ability to contribute to the sustenance of their family*, *this town manager’s concern for public safety*, *this company’s claim that they won’t be competitive under such-and-such circumstances*, *this configuration of rock, mud, vegetation, and water flow*. There are no shortcuts here, and the term “negotiation” is shown to be true to its Latin roots: the negation (*neg-*) of leisure (*-otium*), the *opposite* of freedom from labor.<sup>87</sup> Negotiation is the hard work of encountering others and attempting to compose a world together.<sup>88</sup> Irene would likely resonate with Bruno Latour when he writes: “Everywhere, every day, people are fighting over the very question of the good common world in which everyone—human and nonhuman— wants to live. Nothing and no one must come in to simplify, shorten, limit, or reduce the scope of this debate in advance” (2004a, 130). It does not “boil down,” proposed Irene, to trade-offs

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87 “Freedom from labor” might also be considered a euphemism for “exploitation,” in the sense that the avoidance of negotiation in the composition of life can only come from a kind of unilateral imposition or theft or/from another. In Marxian terms, the appropriation of surplus value from labor would constitute a short-circuiting of negotiation (hence the common image of the capitalist as a parasite or vampire who takes without giving). The force of negotiation remains, of course: it is then transposed into the realm of labor struggle, where powers of living labor are mobilized to undermine, influence, overtake, or transform the capitalist refusal to negotiate at the moment of surplus production.

88 According to the OED, *to negotiate* is “to do business or trade; to engage in commerce,” “to find a way through, round, or over,” and “to succeed in dealing with,” “to manage or bring about successfully” (or not). In particular, I find a playful pun-reading of the following definition quite compelling in light of recent attempts to re-materialize social theory: “To communicate or confer (*with* another or others) for the purpose of arranging some matter” (Oxford English Dictionary 2008b).

between domains, to adjustments in the face of economic laws, or to pre-specified and fixed realms of “interests.” Rather, “it’s about who you’re working with. Are people into winning for their own pride or status? It takes courage to look weak, you know? So it does boil down to *people*” (interview 16). In Roelvink and Gibson-Graham’s terms, this is to say that it boils down to the “praxis of co-existence and interdependence” (2009, 147).

One might, of course, view Irene’s work in terms of “compromise” and look for all of the ways in which each of her stories reveals an ongoing maintenance of hegemony, a complicit actualization of dynamics of State or Capital, or a refusal to engage in “radical” critique. Indeed, Irene did not describe cases in which corporations were banished from Maine communities, “capitalism” was explicitly denounced, the “bad” was separated from the “good,” or in which a great struggle culminated in systemic transformation. Yet neither did she describe situations in which things remained the same. If by “compromise” one means a settling for something “in-between” that neither party is wholly satisfied with, and that fails to enact creative transformation beyond the initial articulation of “camps” or “interests,” then Irene is not at all in favor of this approach. For her, effective negotiation requires that all parties render vulnerable their own positions, realities, and modes of life to new learning. It is not about deciding what the other “must” become, but about a dance between holding one’s values and becoming open to their transformation:

You know, we don’t all have to agree on our values to get along on this earth, but we should be able to find creative solutions to the problems that are vexing us. It would be boring if we all agreed! It isn’t about changing each other, *it’s about finding new ways of surviving*. ... I don’t have to convince everyone I meet that I’m right about my values, but I would like to be able to have the chance to explore unique and creative strategies. And feel like they’d be open to

that. And I want to retain openness in myself for that. (interview 16, emphasis added)

This “openness” is a movement of creativity enmeshed with acknowledged vulnerability, the cultivation of experimental engagements with reality that might compose new assemblages in which old problems and conflicts can be radically transformed. It is about refusing to accept the configurations of choices that emerge from the hegemonic assemblage and working, instead, to construct a new etho-ecology in which other ethico-political possibilities might emerge.

Ossified generalities such as “jobs versus environment” might decompose here into dynamic specificities. Individuals and groups who, in the grip of hegemonic zombies, found themselves on different “sides” might instead begin to explore unexpected, transversal, rhizomic affinities. Complexity and mutual-vulnerability in a world of interdependence might be placed at the fore of ethico-political deliberation, and notions of pre-specified “laws” might be momentarily suspended in the name of creativity and experimentation: “What can a body do?” asks Deleuze, following Spinoza (Deleuze 1990, 257). What can a community do or become? What can a particular complex regional assemblage of humans and nonhumans in Maine become? What is it already becoming, and how can these becomings be followed, amplified, and connected?

### **Nodal Points: Toward New Articulations**

One key strategy for amplifying and connecting multiple becomings of ethical negotiation in Maine is to develop new languages. While one can by no means simply “speak” a new reality into existence, language does enact a particular



power with regard to ecopoietic processes involving humans. When the poet Muriel Rukeyser writes that “the universe is made of stories, not of atoms” (1968, 111), she names a crucial dynamic of material-semiotic performativity: one cannot simply encounter “atoms” without this encounter always already including the language by which it is (in part) made possible. It is not the case that language forms a wall between a (knowable) noumenon and an (unknowable) phenomenon (Kant 1996) as if some stable, objective world lay forever in suspension beyond us. Language, rather, is one dimension of a particular praxis of ecopoiesis, a technology of connection that produces new relations and affects (Latour 1988). If there is a separation enacted along with the connection, this is not simply because *language* fails to grasp a Real that always exceeds it, but because the actualization of a world never exhausts the virtual from which it is continually born (Deleuze 1994; Doel 2010, 123). Words, in and only in assemblage with other forces, may be potent actualizers, enabling the connection of myriad elements into widely-circulating, widely-reaching, and durable forms of life. Economy, society, and environment are cases in point. Seeking pathways for transformative action, one can, therefore, rightly place emphasis on what Gibson-Graham calls a “language politics” (2006a, 54)—on the ways in which language can galvanize, organize, and incite new assemblages.

Following Laclau and Mouffe (2001), Gibson-Graham conceptualizes such a politics in terms of the notion of “nodal points” (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 55). These are sites of discursive convergence and connection, terms or representations that enable multiple differences to be assembled together in “chains of equivalence” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 144) without subordinating each element of the

articulation to a totalizing unity.<sup>89</sup> In Laclau and Mouffe's terms, this involves “a particular element assuming a 'universal' structuring function within a certain discursive field—actually, whatever organization that field has is only the result of that function—without the particularity of the element *per se* determining such a function” (2001, xi). While I wish to resist Laclau and Mouffe's tendency toward Kantian dualism—the assertion of a world of neutral objects that discourse meaningfully organizes (e.g., Laclau and Mouffe 1998)<sup>90</sup>--and their lack of attention to non-linguistic and perhaps nonhuman forms of articulation, the concept of the (discursive) nodal point is nonetheless quite useful. As a writer, an organizer, and an educator working among humans, it is sensible for me to experiment with the capacities of new (or old) languages to compose new ecopoietic articulations.

These, then, are the questions at hand: what ways of speaking might help to more potently express, connect, and strengthen ethical ecopoietic processes that escape capture by the hegemonic trio? Around what nodal point(s) might we attempt to organize new forms of ethico-political practice in Maine? What articulations might have the capacity to resist re-capture by zombie forces, and yet also connect with a wide array of already-existing and emerging forces? Standing amidst the fog bank as ecopoietic articulations and possibilities proliferate beyond

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89 “Without the quilting [nodal] point of an equivalential identification, democratic equivalences would remain merely virtual” (Laclau 2005, 105 insert added).

90 Despite claims to be enacting “a break with the discursive/extra-discursive dichotomy” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 110), a constitutive binarization remains active at the heart of their work. While a diamond, for example, may signify different things in different discursive formations, there remains a passive object behind it all: “A diamond in the market or at the bottom of a mine is the same physical object” (Laclau and Mouffe 1998, 82). In order to both recognize the materiality of the diamond and also pose this materiality as non-determining of the diamond's social articulation, Laclau and Mouffe resort to a kind of crude physicalism, a notion of a “mere existence” of objects (1998, 83). There is some essential *diamondness* that simply passes from one context to the other, taken up or not into various discursive formations, non-determining and inaccessible as such to human encounter, yet nonetheless stable outside of discursive relations. There are “physical objects” and there are “discursive objects,” and the state of the human being is simply to never have an unmediated access to the raw physicality that we nonetheless must acknowledge.

the hegemonic formation, can (and should) we “salvage” the terms of this hegemony in a radically resignified form? Can the economic, the social, and the environmental be rearticulated and redeployed in ways that break with the hegemonic trio? Or have these terms themselves been irrevocably tainted by the power of this historical articulation? These are strategic questions that lack definitive answers, yet they must nonetheless be carefully engaged.

### *Resignification and Its Limits*

J.K Gibson-Graham offers a tentative and experimental answer to the question of strategic resignification in her introduction to the second edition of *The End of Capitalism* (2006b). She describes why, in the face of critical concerns to the contrary, she retains the term “economy” even while seeking to radically break with previous conceptions:

In the case of 'economy,' we are hoping to take advantage of the fact that a distinctive economic sphere has been performed and made 'true,' coming into existence as something widely acknowledged and socially consequential, something that participates in organizing life and things within and around it ... As a powerful everyday concept, 'the economy' has libidinal and affective purchase; people pay attention when we start playing around with it ... If we abandon the concept, and resort (out of purism?) to an ontology that doesn't involve an 'economy,' we are at risk of being ignored. (Gibson-Graham 2006c, xxi)

The hegemonic articulation has conferred a certain power on the term “economy,” yet this power does not inevitably serve hegemony. It can be turned against itself, away from itself, and can constitute a base of strength from which to articulate new assemblages. It is as if Gibson-Graham were intent on stealing some of the performative power of the category by dressing up in its clothes, putting on some of

its airs, and sneaking into its meetings intent on hijacking the process for other purposes. On one level, this approach affirms the very thing it challenges: the power of a hegemonic articulation. Yet on another, it proposes to snap this power off from the assemblage, carry it away, and join it with another set of transformative relations.

It is an important strategy, serving to remind us that even the most hegemonic of categories are sites of struggle that can be seized, mobilized, and turned against their inventors. Words and categories, like tools, do not have essences but are, rather, relations (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 60–61). One can thus imagine the entire trio de-linked from the diagram of power (nature/culture-capital/state-development) and redeployed in a radically-different set of connections: Gibson-Graham's rearticulation of “economy” as a space of ethical negotiation, for example, linked with Bruno Latour's redeployment of “the social” as the ongoing process of composing relations between myriad beings (Latour 1986; 2005), and Tim Ingold's reconceptualisation of “the environment” as the tangled mesh of relational lines that such a wild and plural sociality constitutes (Ingold 2009). I will, in fact, explore elements of these articulations further in my composition of “ecological livelihoods.” For the moment, however, I want to propose that the strengths of this kind of rearticulation are also fraught with significant dangers.

If the image of snapping off a part from the hegemonic assemblage and carrying it into another seems compelling (and it is, as Gibson-Graham suggests, an inspiring way to expand political possibility beyond the paralysis of purity), some mess must be added to the picture. What is snapped off is a *node* in a web of

relations, not all of which are themselves severed in the snapping. The term “economy” (like its other hegemonic companions) comes away with multiple other things still attached, trailing behind: it is like trying to dig a single “root” from a rhizomic plant. Put differently, terms are haunted by the assemblages from which they come and to which they remain (at least partially) attached. Any attempts to radically resignify “the economy” must run up against the multiple ways in which hegemony may be imported into the very heart of a new assemblage. We find ourselves suddenly, once again, talking about “the” alternative economy, seeking a blueprint for the new systematic economic domain, identifying new “laws” and forms of inevitability, constructing new closures. As I have discussed above, even the kinds of careful, performative tracings enacted by concepts such as “economization” (Çaliskan and Callon 2009; 2010) often end up re-affirming that which they sought to question.

Can one propose a new definition of or add a new adjective (such as “community,” “solidarity,” or “ecological,” for example) to powerful hegemonic words and effectively turn them from their conventional significations? Does this strategy underplay the power of one assemblage to link with and inhabit (even if by haunting) another? Does it remain too optimistic about breaking hegemonic habits of thought and feeling linked with hegemonic terms? On a more pragmatic note, might one tire of saying, “No, when I say 'economy' I don't mean what everyone else means, I mean...”; or, “No, it looks like a noun, but it's really a verb”? Or might we get mostly “laughed out of the snowmobile store” (Sandra, interview 3) when suggesting, “Maybe nonhumans have economies, too” or “Maybe we should think of the environment not as a domain, but as a *question...*”. Meanwhile, remaining in the

fog bank (“It’s all too complicated, and *all* categories are problematic”) is of little help when trying to appear useful in any on-the-ground struggle or policy debate.

### *Experimenting with Refusal*

My intention here is not to propose a settlement to the strategic questions I have raised, nor to affirm them as two opposed sides that one must inevitably choose. As Foucault reminds us, “everything is dangerous” (1984, 343). What I propose to do is simply this: if Gibson-Graham has chosen to deploy the strategy of resignifying “economy,” and to experiment with the possibilities and dangers such a move carries, then I will explore a different pathway for the purposes of further experimentation. What might it look like, I want to ask, to (re)compose articulations that refuse the categories of the hegemonic trio? At the same time, can this be done without mobilizing a language that is utterly alien to the daily conversations and struggles that now take place under the aegis of economy, society, and environment? How might I (re)compose in ways that have a chance of resisting easy re-capture by the hegemonic assemblage while also not “leaving behind” possibilities of constructing meaningful alliances and connections with those whose institutional positions and daily exigencies continue to demand some connection with/in hegemony?

## From Quality of Life to Livelihoods

For a clue about how this might unfold, and as a bridge to the work of the next chapter, I turn to a pivotal moment in my own thinking, prompted by my conversation with Sandra the regional economic development council director. As a prompt, I showed her the image of the three overlapping circles of economy, community, and environment published in the *Maine Measures of Growth in Focus* report (Maine Development Foundation 2013, see figure 1 in chapter 1). Sandra essentially rejected these categories. I have already described, in chapter 6, how she challenged the notion of the social as a human-centered space, proposing that well-being must also be “for our rivers and for our fish and for the animals” (interview 3). She also sharply condemned conventional notions of the economy as “ethnocentric” and refused to accept a universal measure for the well-being of her rural community:

People like to use Gross Domestic Product and all those ways to measure, and I don't pay much attention to those, because [sighs] ... I think it's a bunch of baloney, frankly. I think you can't compare [this town] with a town of 4,200 in another state ... How would you compare that? Incomes? Median incomes? Maybe. The percentage of income in heating your house? Maybe, maybe you're getting closer to it? How much it costs to feed your family? Would you count the farmers market then, or would you just count what's at the [supermarket]? You know? Would you count the tomatoes I ate this summer from my backyard, you know? So really, no. I don't think you can compare. (interview 3, inserts added for locational anonymity)

The regime of measurement enforced by economic hegemony is, for Sandra, a ridiculous game: “You measure up and you measure down and there are winners and, you know, that whole winners and losers [thing]... and, is that really... *really*...? [exasperated laugh] (interview 3, insert added). Each place, rather, is a unique context in which a particular community strives to realize its own version of a good

life that can never be rendered commensurate with the aspirations of another or with a generic model. “When you live here you've got to *get* it,” she told me, “You've got to get that you can't run out to Starbucks for your morning coffee ... I mean you've got to appreciate what is here and not compare to the rest of the world, because it really is ... Well *you* know!” (interview 3, vocal emphasis in original).

Sandra's notion of economic development challenged some of the most central elements of the hegemonic articulation even while appearing as common sense. Development is, for her, a local, collective process of constituting sufficiency and well-being: “I think that wherever you are, it's having people work together as a community to get their needs met, and some of their wants and desires ... as many as *possible* [laughs] (interview 3, vocal emphasis in original). This is not just about employment, income, or growth; it is a multi-dimensional process that includes these elements and much more:

Economic development is taking what we have here and building upon it. Taking the natural beauty that we have here, the open spaces that we have here, the vistas, the downtowns, beautiful villages, and building upon that because it's unique and different from a lot of the world, a lot of the United States. And different again from other places in Maine. ... Everything you do to strengthen a community, a downtown, strengthens the economy. Anything you do to make it attractive for people to want to visit, or a better place to live; anything you can do to be as self-sufficient as you can in a community, *that's* building the economy to me. (Sandra, interview 3)

“The economy” here is neither a force or a domain, but rather a relational space of sustenance, a normative aspiration built around the specificities of people and place. It is the composition of habitat, the enactment of *livelihoods*.

When I showed Sandra the the Maine Development Foundation's image of triple circles, I intended to spark a reaction relative to its clear representation of the hegemonic trio: Does she buy into it? Does she resist it? But Sandra's reaction



swerved in a different direction, finding something new (or *becoming*) at the heart of hegemony. She looked at the triple circles with a furrowed brow, paused, and then proposed, “It’s almost like you want to start in the *center*, you want to start with *quality of life*. What’s the most important thing? ... What makes your quality of life good?” (interview 3). And, moreover, whose quality of life is this? That of humans, to be sure, but also “for our rivers and for our fish and for the animals” (interview 3). Sandra proceeded to describe this quality of life using the terms of the hegemonic trio, but with a difference:

I think it’s community that makes your quality of life good. And the environment, *literally* in terms of your health makes your quality of life, but the *beauty* can also enhance your quality of life, you know. Peacefulness. And then economy you have to have the means to, you know, put a roof over your head. You have to have some means to keep that roof over your head, whatever that is and whatever your *idea* of that is. (interview 3, vocal emphasis in original)

What is different here—that is, what *escapes capture*—is that, with the exception of “community” (which can be read as indicating a broad notion of sociality and solidarity), the hegemonic terms are *superfluous to the argument*. One can, in fact, remove these words entirely from Sandra’s statement without losing any substance. This is because “quality of life” has effectively *hollowed out* and marginalized the hegemonic trio by claiming its place in the middle of the diagram.

I had indeed neglected to notice a key dynamic at play where the three circles of the Maine Development Foundation’s image meet, the central space in which the circles coincide and blur. In a hegemonic reading of the diagram—a tracing—“quality of life” appears as little more than a quaint marketing phrase, something to fill the middle space where the three ruling categories overlap. In Sandra’s reading, however, economy, society (community), and environment are utterly peripheral to the action. With “quality of life” as the normative heart of the

diagram, one can see the center not as a space where three still-stable categories meet and interact, but rather as a space of their radical *destabilization*—the space of the *fog bank*. Standing in the middle, so to speak, and looking outward, the hegemonic trio begins to appear not as a set of necessary conditions for life, but as three distinct yet interrelated ways to capture, discipline, and colonize—various attempts to capture life-force in the name of zombie sustenance. Shorn of their foundational status by this new view, they each appear as the monsters they are: hollow, pale, sickly—spaces of *non-quality* of life, perhaps even zones of death. Economy, society, and environment shrivel up as free-standing domains, capable of sustaining their own logics, values, interests, or needs. The only space that remains is that into which the trio has dissolved: the space of the very question of *life* itself.

“It's almost like you want to start in the center”: Sandra's proposition can be read as a call toward what Deleuze and Guattari term thinking *par le milieu*, or “through the middle” (1987, 25; see also Stengers 2009). This is the very opposite of a compromise that would seek a “balance” between two stable elements; it is, rather, a movement that sweeps away the very terms within which such trade-offs had been posed. “Between things,” write Deleuze and Guattari, “does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” (1987, 25). Sandra's articulation of quality of life shifts us from the major and molar categories of the hegemonic trio while also refusing a complete deterritorialization that would lead to despair or paralysis. We find ourselves, instead, in a space of active becoming, of vital questions, where life is lived neither in subordination to a hegemonic capture, nor as a fragmented (in)difference. Taken

as a transversal call to ethical negotiation, “quality of life” becomes a “meso device” in what Isabelle Stengers calls “mesopolitics,” politics *par le milieu*: “The typical success of a meso device,” she writes, “would be to confer upon a situation the power to make those who are attached to it, in an *a priori* conflictual manner, think together. Not overcome the conflict, but transversalize its terms” (Stengers 2009, 5).

“Quality of life,” of course, is not itself a radical term, and is rarely associated with radical politics. In Maine, it has become a common rallying point around which economic developers, social workers, and environmental advocates gather. It is most often effectuated as the vague, normative goal that the balance of hegemonic categories is meant to serve, and thus just as often appears as a key element in the ongoing stabilization and legitimation of hegemony. Yet Sandra's articulation points toward a crucial underside to this formation: The quality of life discourse is popular, I believe, because it offers a language with which policy professionals can speak of their work without immediate recourse to the categories they know (even if tacitly) are problematic. Thus even as it on one hand appears to serve hegemony, it opens up lines of flight on the other. “It's not just how big is the pile of money you get,” said Calvin, director of an economic development think-tank, “but what is the quality of life you have? That's a much larger conversation” (interview 4). In the end, suggested Paul the social worker, employment is only one small dimension of social service. “What we really do is try to bring resources together ... to try to make... things better for everybody. It's quality of life, basically, is what it amounts to” (interview 35). Bradley, the conservation collaborative director, made the point even more boldly: “The economy is a tool, it's not an end. ... I don't care if people have jobs, I care that people have quality *lives*. And jobs are a route towards generating a quality of life” (interview 17). Quality of life is a

dynamic middle-space that might serve as a key entry point into a different kind of politics in Maine. To ask the question of this “quality”—to take it seriously—is to open a space that economy, society, and environment cannot assimilate or contain. It is this open space that I propose to speak of in terms of “livelihoods.”

## Chapter 8

# Ecological Livelihoods

We need to have people realize who they are within the context of where they are. ... Because how can you make decisions if you're ignorant of what your interrelationships are, and what your reliances are? (Trevor, interview 11)

### Introduction

Ecopoiesis, as I have described in chapter 7, serves as an conceptual tool that can help loosen the grip of the hegemonic articulation while encouraging a focus on the specificities of habitat composition. The concept of ethical negotiation enables a distinction between those ecopoietic articulations that tend to anesthetize or close down possibilities for mutually-vulnerable co-becomings, and those that tend to expose us to our interdependencies and to our mutual transformation(s) before them. A key political challenge lies in the construction of nodal points that can escape the zombie grip of the hegemonic trio, encourage and strengthen the composition of anti-anesthetizing habitats, and foster more robust, ethical, ecopoietic negotiations. To be more precise and dramatic: an urgent task of our era is to develop languages and frameworks that enable political articulation and collective action beyond economy, society, and environment and the diagram of power they actualize. Such an exigency is clear in Maine, where the politics of the trio effectively constitute an *oikos* in which capitalist employment and monetary exchange are posed as the only legitimate modes of sustenance; the autonomous,

self-sufficient (employed) individual is installed as the model of humanity; exploitative and instrumental separations between humans and the more-than-human living world are reinforced; and all other concerns are obligated to subordinate themselves to the demands of these constraints in order to appear legitimate. With what language(s) might we contest such a configuration and articulate a radically different set of political possibilities? What language(s) might do this in such a way as to connect with lines of flight that are already present “on the ground,” and even, perhaps, among those who might seem most wedded to the hegemonic trio?

Transposing Gibson-Graham's notion of “community economy” out of the key of economy, and building on intuitions present in the common Maine discourse of “quality of life,” I propose that a notion of *livelihoods*, or more specifically, of *ecological livelihoods*, might be capable of such work. This is, at least, an experiment worth pursuing. In this chapter I will begin the work of composing an articulation of livelihoods that draws together and reconfigures multiple elements of what was previously captured (partially) by “economy,” “society,” and “environment.” While I will ground this work as much as possible in my fieldwork, I also continue to write, at times, in the more speculative and theoretical register of the previous chapter. Livelihoods is a proposition that I craft in hopes of one day offering it back to those whom I have interviewed (and others), to explore what work it might do. It is not intended as an exhaustive ontological proposal, a definitive “model” of the world, or the composition of a new molar category; rather, it is a provisional experiment oriented toward the possibility of seeing, feeling, and acting differently amidst multiple interdependencies, negotiations, and becomings in and across place(s).

## Livelihood(s)

“Livelihood” is a common word, widely used in Maine and elsewhere to refer generally to the making and procuring of a living, the enacting of sustenance. It has been used in English, via a variety of spellings (*lifelode, liflade, lyvelode, lyveliod, livelyhoode*, and others) since at least the 13th century (Oxford English Dictionary 2008c) and unlike the three terms of the hegemonic trio, it has meant roughly the same thing for all of this time, weathering the fall of feudalism and the rise of industrial modernity.<sup>91</sup> Alongside of and transversal to the various striations (and zombifications) of economy, society, and environment, livelihood has subsisted beneath the surface through multiple historical eras as a kind of “people’s” discourse—a term of *practice*, of experience, of complex lives lived and negotiated from the inside, *par le milieu*, rather than categorized from without. Livelihood is what unfolds in the space of life’s action, the middle-space in which the hegemonic trio blurs and dissolves into the power-laden specificities of encounter and (sometimes ethical) negotiation. Having not been wholly captured by a particular hegemonic metrology, it indicates a diversity of activity, a variety of skills and knowledges, a plethora of possible sites of action, and multiple configurations of ever-changing relations and processes that cannot be captured by a generality. Livelihood is, in this way, a *minor* (as opposed to a major) category: it resists unification under a singular standard of measure, image of action, or domain of life (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 105).<sup>92</sup> When invoked, it most often comes linked

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91 This is gleaned from etymologies of the word, sourced from the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=livelihood>).

92 See chapter 1 for a discussion of “major” categories.

to particular contexts, stories, and strategies: How do people make a living in Maine? As Mainers well know, we do it in *all kinds* of ways.

### *The Transversal Language of Livelihood*

“Yes! *Livelihoods!* That's right!” exclaimed Richard, the CEO of a major Maine social service nonprofit, when I proposed the term toward the end our interview (interview 29). We had been talking about the profound shortcomings of the hegemonic trio and its associated divisions. Richard had expressed his frustration, throughout our conversation, at the various ways in which the “social” is marginalized relative to the “economic,” and he made clear his desire separation between humans and “environment” to be overcome. Yet he clearly lacked a language to speak otherwise. “I'm not sure you can talk about one without talking about the other,” he proposed initially, “So in some way they are *linked* ... I'm not necessarily sure it matters which is first or second or third ... one doesn't have more importance than the other” (interview 29). Later, he opted for a wonderful new turn of phrase: “All three *swarm*,” he suggested (interview 29, emphasis added), invoking the image of multiple concerns buzzing around, inside and out.

In a subsequent array of personal stories, Richard invoked the hegemonic categories in overlapping “fog bank” senses to describe key concerns that face Maine people: “Do you have enough money to live on? Do you have a way to produce something in order to make a living? Does my family have enough? And do they have opportunities to create their own... economy?” (interview 29). Community, he suggested, is the space of care and support that sustains us beyond



the money economy, and it too constitutes “economy”: “I also see a different set of economies, and that is ... outside of the money generating economy, and that is peoples' *talents* economy. And that *works* in neighborhoods. We have people that barter their time, their talents. They volunteer. ... there's *that* economy” (interview 29, vocal emphasis in original). The environment as well, for Richard, is a site of sustenance and collectivity. His words were surprisingly aligned with some of the key terms of my project:

What I think helps wrap the community in a nice neat little bow, is the environment. And maybe it's because we live here [in Maine], because it's important to us, because... I don't know how you separate it out. It's... it's a *fabric* of... Here, you don't just talk about the environment, you *actualize* it in all kinds of different ways, whether it's garbage to gardens, composting, or recycling. ... or community gardens or caring for open spaces. (Interview 29, vocal emphasis in original)

The categories of the hegemonic trio clearly did not work to articulate or contain Richard's notions, yet he had no other way to describe things. Livelihoods suddenly appeared for him as a term that was at once familiar and transversal, already cutting across the dividing lines of the trio.

Richard was not alone. “I don't really care about the quality of the economy —that's an abstract thing! I care about people's *lives*,” said Bradley, director of a conservation collaborative (interview 17). This was not an expression of callousness toward the hard realities of making ends meet, but an expression of frustration at the ways in which the hegemonic categories reduce well-being to “economic” measures. Frank, a department director at a large nonprofit social service agency, shared this sentiment. When he proposed that “the economy” was fundamentally about “employment” (interview 38), I asked him to clarify. “Maybe my use of the word employment is narrower than what you're taking it to be,” he explained, “It's

about livelihood. You can be self-employed, you can be gainfully... you know, pursuing your own *livelihood*... But it's being able to make ends meet. It's being able to generate what you *need*, put food on the table ... and *more*, right?" (interview 38, vocal emphasis in original). Indeed, while some interviewees did use the term "livelihood" to refer primarily to paid employment, Frank's deployment was a common one: livelihood refers quite often to all of the diverse means by which Mainers (and others), in the words of environmental researcher Greg, "piece together lives" (interview 15) from multiple sources and through multiple activities and relations.

Such an articulation clearly cuts across and through the conventional economic, social, and environmental distinctions. Lives are composed from, and emerge from, all kinds of elements that cannot be contained by the hegemonic trio. As Paula, for example, director of a statewide conservation organization, suggested:

You can't talk about livelihoods without talking about taking care of the environment as well ... you know, it's all connected ... We're talking planetary imbalances that are coming from climate change, and sea level rise and all different kinds of things that are going to have potentially disastrous results for us from a health perspective and a livelihoods perspective. (interview 26)

To make a living, and to have a living made for us by others, is necessarily to be bound up in multi-species socialities, to engage complex ethical questions of interdependence and responsibility, to mobilize strategies that cannot be categorized in conventional terms, and to participate in relations that are beyond accounting and beyond total capture by Capital or State. Moreover, it is not just *humans* who enact livelihoods. Consider, for example, the title of this letter to the Maine Sunday Telegram, challenging aspects of the Plum Creek resort development plan described in chapter 3: "*Cutting damages deer livelihoods*" (Ritchie 2006).

One can, of course, find many mobilizations of “livelihood” that are far from revolutionary articulations beyond the hegemonic trio. People in Maine commonly speak of paid employment in terms of “earning a livelihood,” or of livelihoods being “dependent” on a particular industry or resource. Of any “environmental” protection proposal, for example, one can find people asking about the livelihoods of those in directly-impacted industries: “How is this going to affect their job, their livelihood, their paycheck?” (Stephen, environmental advocate, interview 19). But even these articulations fail to fully capture livelihood into the hegemonic formation, for there is always the possibility that livelihood could take another form, unfold via a different set of strategies, or appear wholly transformed within an altogether distinct assemblage. Take, for example, the definition of “economy” given by Eric, the regional economist: “By the economy I basically mean some system of primarily voluntary exchange of goods and services and money that people undertake as their means of livelihood” (interview 1). Livelihood is, indeed, hitched here to a classic assemblage of market exchange; yet there is nothing necessary about this relationship. Such exchange is, after all, only a *means* of livelihood, and there could presumably be (as there, in fact, *are*) many others. One can not only “earn” a livelihood (as a common hegemonic phrasing would have it), but also be given, shared, stolen, scavenged, gleaned, inherited, or blessed with one. Because livelihood refers to *life*, and because life is a force of wildness that always escapes complete capture, domestication, domination, or objectification (Deleuze 1988a, 77, referring to Foucault’s notion of life as resistance), livelihood remains a fertile articulation for composing habitats and inhabitants anew.

## Various Approaches to Livelihood

The language of “livelihoods” as a strategy for overcoming hegemonic articulations is not a new proposition. At least since Karl Polanyi and his collaborators (Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson 1957; Polanyi 1977), the term has been linked with various efforts to challenge orthodoxies of conventional economic theory and international development. In particular, this language is most often used to displace the hegemony of paid-work and monetary exchange via capitalist markets: humans make livings, various theorizations suggest, through all kinds of activities and in relation to all kinds of institutions, motivations, and contexts. This is a crucial set of insights to build on, but as I will argue below, such approaches tend to merge the aspects of the economic and social without challenging an articulation of “the environment” as a domain of resources. The *human* remains at the center of action, and (often in the form of individuals and households) still navigates—even “optimizes”—amidst a world of objects or resources. A radically ecological notion of livelihoods, located within a broader ecopoiesis, remains to be elaborated.

### *Polanyian Articulations*

For Karl Polanyi, livelihood marks out a specifically “economic” space, but in a manner much more inclusive than the conventional economic theory he contests. What often passes for economics in general, he argues, is actually “an ingrained habit of thought peculiar to conditions of life under that type of economy the nineteenth century created throughout all industrialized societies” (1977, 5). In what

Polanyi calls “formal economics” (1992, 31), the economy is reduced to market exchange and its associated optimizing rationality operating under conditions of scarcity—a problematic conflation of “the human economy in general with its market form” (Polanyi 1977, 6). Contrasting the formal with the “substantive economy” (1992, 31), Polanyi proposes that a true empirical economics must examine all of the diverse ways in which human beings generate *livelihoods*, myriad “instituted process[es] of interaction serving the satisfaction of material wants” (1977, 31). As he describes:

The substantive meaning [of economy] implies neither choice nor insufficiency of means; man's livelihood may or may not involve the necessity of choice and, if choice there be, it need not be induced by the limiting effect of 'scarcity' of the means; indeed, some of the most important physical and social conditions of livelihood such as the availability of air and water or a loving mother's devotion to her infant are not, as a rule, so limiting. (1992, 29)

Livelihood thus radically expands the economic to include all forms of human material sustenance, secured via “interchange with [the] natural and social environment” (1992, 29).

We can see here that Polanyi continues to rely on the categories of the hegemonic trio despite having expanded and blurred them: there remains an “economic,” a “social,” and an “environment,” and livelihood continues to unfold in “the interaction between man and his surroundings” (Polanyi 1977, 31). In particular, a foundational distinction remains in Polanyi's work between “man” as active agent and “nature” (or “environment”) as a relatively passive—though crucial—source of sustenance (1992, 29; 1977, 19). The social remains distinct enough that Polanyi can speak of the “disembedding” of the economic—however ultimately impossible to fully implement (Block 2001, xxv)—from the society it both serves and

dominates (Polanyi 2001).<sup>93</sup> Additionally, as Çaliskan and Callon (2009) argue, Polanyi's articulation remains tied to the assumption of an “economic” whose definitional contents need only be transformed. Formalists (who reduce economy to optimization and market exchange) and substantivists (embracing a broader array of rationalities and livelihood activities), in fact, share a common epistemology: they both “draw their attention towards that which is economic, what we have called the economic X. The salient difference between formalism and substantivism involves the identity of the X” (2009, 377). In other words, and despite Polanyi's contributions to the genealogy of “economy,” Polanyian substantivism remains tied to a set of categories that are always already bound up with the articulation they ostensibly seek to challenge. Perhaps most crucially, a division is maintained between the *materiality* of sustenance (that which can legitimately be called “economic”) and all else which may not take such a form (those “immaterial” goods which would remain wholly “social”), and the boundary between human subjects and nonhuman objects remains stable. The language of livelihoods continues to hold out the possibility of something beyond these divides, but is not yet able to actualize such a movement.

Polanyi's notion of livelihood has been taken up, expanded, and transformed in a variety of ways, yet none of these explicitly challenge its hegemonic remainders. Economic anthropologist Rhoda Halperin (1994), for example,

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93 It is important to note the significant controversy surrounding Polanyi's notion of embeddedness. While some readings of *The Great Transformation* (in particular) suggest that the market economy was *actually* disembedded from society (e.g., Braudel 1983), others propose a more nuanced reading in which an impossible disembedding is nonetheless proposed by economic theory and thus dangerously enacted in practice (Block 2001). Fred Block (2003) proposes that Polanyi's notion of embeddedness developed over time and was not fully fleshed out at the time of writing *The Great Transformation*. In later work (e.g., Polanyi 1992), he is much clearer about the fact of the “always embedded market economy” (Block 2003, 276). Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that the distinction (and connection) between domains of “economy” and “society” remains operative in any form of this theorization.

elaborates a Marxian-Polanyian approach to livelihoods that remains tied to a clear distinction between “ecology” and “economy” (Halperin 1994, 83). Ecology, for Halperin, refers to processes involving the movement and transformation of matter and energy, and is distinct from “institutional” factors involving modes of social organization (1994, 59). “Economy” emerges at the intersection of the two in what should now be a familiar triangulation. While Halperin's intention is to avoid the kinds of environmental determinism associated with certain strands of economic anthropology, and thus to assert a space of cultural (and, presumably, agential) determination, her formulation nonetheless remains wholly tied to an articulation of an objective nature upon which culture can and must act. Economy becomes “the material-means provisioning process in cultural systems” (1994, 83), the site of interface between culture and materiality, a mediation between a subjective humanity and an objective nature. Key elements of the diagram of power (chapter 4) remain intact.

Feminist economic literature on “social provisioning” (M. Power 2004; Hutchinson and Mellor 2004; Neysmith and Reitsma-Street 2005; J. Nelson 2009) does not enact such a clear distinction between ecology and economy, yet nonetheless does little to challenge the Nature-Culture divide that haunts even the most “substantive” versions of economics. Social provisioning, like Polanyi's substantivism, begins from a rejection of economic articulations that reduce livelihood to dynamics of market exchange and utility-maximizing rationality:

Social provisioning need not be done through the market; it need not be done for selfish or self-interested reasons, although neither of these is inconsistent with social provisioning, either. Thus, the concept allows for a broader understanding of economic activity that includes women's unpaid and nonmarket activities and for understandings of motivation that don't fall under narrow or tautological notions of self-interest. The term also emphasizes process as well as

outcomes. The manners in which we provide for ourselves, both paid and unpaid, are included in the analysis. (Power 2004, 6)

A strength of the provisioning approach is its emphasis (not unlike in Polanyi, but here amplified) on *process*. Rather than constituting a system or logic of organization, social provisioning “illuminates the ways a society *organizes* itself to produce and reproduce material life” (M. Power 2004, 7, emphasis added). Additionally, and similarly to the language of livelihoods, provisioning focuses on life lived from the *inside*: “The term 'provisioning' directs attention to the purpose of economic activity. Passive images of workers and consumers are replaced with those of people facing challenges around how to meet their needs and obligations” (Neysmith and Reitsma-Street 2005, 382). Yet the ontological structure of the hegemonic articulation remains relatively intact: humans navigate (now collectively and institutionally rather than just as individual workers and consumers) as agents (variously constrained or empowered) in a world of resources. There remains an “environment” (Power 2004, 15) as a sustaining yet distinct domain of “natural resources” (2004, 15) in which a now substantive, wholly-social, and processual economy unfolds its work of making a living.

### *The Subsistence Perspective*

While not explicitly elaborating (though certainly using) the language of livelihoods, Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies' “subsistence perspective” (1999) is an important Marxian articulation that must be engaged by any work seeking to acknowledge, strengthen, and cultivate diverse, non-exploitative practices of life-sustenance. For Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies, as with



Polanyi, there are two fundamentally incompatible notions of “economy.” Their bifurcation does not rest, however, on a formal/substantive distinction, but one much closer to what I proposed in chapter 6 between the economy of accumulation and the economy of sustenance. As Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies describe:

There exists a different conception of 'economy', which is both older and younger than the capitalist patriarchal one ... based on the ongoing colonisation of women, of other peoples and nature. This 'other' economy puts life and everything necessary to produce and maintain life on this planet at the center of economic and social activity [rather than] the never-ending accumulation of dead money. (1999, 5 insert added)

It is a matter here of life versus death; indeed, of life versus *capitalism* and associated processes of exploitation, colonization, and oppression.

The use of the term “perspective” is quite intentional in this formulation. Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies are not proposing a “new economic model” in place of the old (1999, 7), but rather seeking to render more visible and viable a host of practices, traditions, and aspirations that are already present yet often marginalized or weakened by hegemonic power. “Subsistence” is thus not a *domain*; it does not map onto either the hegemonic “economy” or “society,” but rather cuts across both transversally. It is a set of productive and reproductive practices, “all work that is expended on the creation, re-creation and maintenance of immediate life and which has no other purpose [such as, for example, commodity production and private profit]” (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999, 20, insert added). Subsistence, the work of life itself, is what animates capital(ism)'s “dead money” (1999, 21) as the force of living labor, yet it is also what capital exploits, denies, and degrades. A politics of subsistence recognizes that “without subsistence production, no commodity production; yet without commodity production, definitely, subsistence production” (1999, 20). Practices of non-capitalist livelihood must be valorized and organized to

enact revolutionary de-linkages from capital and thereby render its force increasingly impotent.

This is a powerful perspective, and one that crucially foregrounds the historical and ongoing relations of colonization and exploitation composed between capitalist hegemony and diverse practices of life-sustenance, particularly those enacted by women and workers of the majority world. Yet some serious limitations haunt this articulation. Perhaps most simply and overtly, the language of “subsistence” runs up against strategic difficulties in its common association with bare-bones survival. One is hard pressed to avoid reading the prefix *-sub* without thinking of something *beneath* or *below*, as in “substandard” or “subhuman.” In Maine, subsistence is likely to invoke images of poverty, hunger, vulnerability, living on the edge. Richard Judd's (2000) working-class history of conservation in New England describes the long process by which subsistence practices in Maine were shifted from mainstream modes of life to something demanding escape: who would not want to leave behind an uncertain life increasingly seen as “a residue of backcountry indolence dragging down [Maine's] rigorous industrial economy” (Judd 2000, 136, insert added)? Even if we view such a shift in critical terms (and rightly we should), as a mode of capitalist and patriarchal domination, we are nonetheless faced with a sense that one might not get far advocating in Maine for a politics of “subsistence.”

A second and more substantive conceptual difficulty with Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies' articulation of the subsistence perspective is its reliance on (and reading of) the Marxian distinction between use-value and exchange-value to define livelihoods. “In non-capitalist subsistence,” they write, “use-values are produced for the satisfaction of limited human needs” (1999, 57). These use-values are equated

with Marx's (1992, 200) concept of "simple exchange" (C-M-C: commodity-money-commodity) in which "use value is exchanged for use value" (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999, 57). Exchange-value production, in contrast, is associated with Marx's notation of M-C-M' (money-commodity-profit) (1992, 251) and generates commodities that have "no other purpose than to be exchanged in the market for a higher price than their production costs" (1999, 57). At first glance, this formulation seems compelling in its simplicity: there is a regime oriented around usefulness (livelihoods) and a regime ruled by exchange and accumulation (capitalism); there are two kinds of value—one *good*, one *bad*—and we must choose.

One problem here is that use-value and exchange-value are not, in fact, formulated in such a manner by Marx. The schema of simple exchange (C-M-C) is actually a prime example of a *metamorphosis* between use-value and exchange value, a "conversion of the commodity into money, and the re-conversion of the money into a commodity" (Marx 1992, 200). The use-value/exchange-value distinction does not actually map onto the distinction between an "economy" oriented around sustenance and one oriented around profit; it names, rather, two sides of a single binary that rely on each other for their sense and analytical power. As Gayatri Spivak argues, Marx renders use into a "value form" not because there is a separate (or separable) "use-value" economy, but because this abstraction is necessary to explain the way that living labor becomes commodified labor-power, immeasurable use becomes measurable use-value, uses are rendered fungible, and the whole dynamic of capitalist accumulation is made possible (Spivak 2000, 1–2). Contrary to Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies' suggestion, *use* does not become use-value in subsistence relations until it is rendered exchangeable.

Even then, however—and this is a crucial additional problem with the formulation—exchangeability does not yet necessarily constitute a *capitalist* (or even exploitative) dynamic. There is not the use-production of subsistence on one side, and the exchange-production of capitalism on the other, for subsistence may involve *all kinds* of uses and exchanges, measured and unmeasured. Whether either of these take *value form* is one question; whether they are rendered *capitalist* by their subsumption into a wider assemblage of enforced accumulation is another one entirely. The subsistence perspective risks closing off far too many possibilities for livelihood enactment and organization by adopting such oversimplified formulas.

Moreover, and finally, the reduction of livelihood to *use* (never mind the value form) is itself problematic, since—as I will argue further in chapter 9—life is constituted by far more than the human production of useful items and relations from the raw materials of “nature.” Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies strongly emphasize human autonomy as the heart of subsistence. It is equated with “independence,” “self-sufficiency,” and “self-reliance” (1999, 21), where one pictures—as in so many radical left economic visions—powerful humans standing at the center of a world that is now, finally, at their command (albeit to care for and “sustain”). As in the Polanyian formulation, key elements of the modern diagram of power are affirmed, and too many openings are eclipsed: our constitutive dependence on others; the impossibility of “self-sufficiency” and the ethico-political challenges that accompany such acknowledgement; the possibility of sharing a world with more-than-human co-inhabitants who are not just our (carefully stewarded) resources. Once again, we need a formulation of livelihood that refuses human(ist) conceits in the name of something more open, vulnerable, and destabilizing of the hegemonic trio and its diagram.

### *The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach*

Perhaps the most elaborated notions of livelihood have been developed in the field of development theory and practice, in the form of the “sustainable livelihoods approach” (SLA). Variably drawing on, adding to, subtracting from, and transforming many of the insights of Polanyi and subsequent substantivists, and taken up by both activist scholars and international development institutions, SLA is a complex zone of converging and conflicting articulations. The language of “livelihoods” first entered the sphere of development discourse in the famous Brundtland report, as a straightforward reproduction of hegemony: “The most basic of all needs is for a livelihood: that is, employment” (WCED 1987, 49–50). Another WECD report of the same year, *Food 2000* (1987b), expanded the definition slightly, but rendered it synonymous with a generic set of resources: “Livelihood is defined as adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs” (quoted in Chambers and Conway 1991, 5). It was Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway, in a widely-cited (1991) working paper, who transformed the term into a foundational articulation for a new practice of development. In their definition:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term. (1991, 6)

Livelihood, for Chambers and Conway, is not reducible either to “employment” or to “stocks and flows”; rather, it is a dynamic, power-laden field of relations in which lives are made and unmade. There is a radical dynamism in their articulation that goes well beyond the simple image of the more or less agential

human standing amidst a world of resources to be managed, protected, or mobilized. The reciprocal relation of habitat and inhabitant, of agency and the etho-ecology which renders it possible (or impossible), is apparent, for example, in their understanding of the dynamics of “means” and “ends”:

A livelihood in its simplest sense is the means of gaining a living. Capabilities are both an end and means of livelihood: a livelihood provides the support for the enhancement and exercise of capabilities (an end); and capabilities (a means) enable livelihood to be gained. Equity is both an end and a means: any minimum definition of equity must include adequate and decent livelihoods for all (an end); and equity in assets and access are preconditions (means) for gaining adequate and decent livelihoods. Sustainability, too, is both end and means: sustainable stewardship of resources is a value (or end) in itself; and it provides conditions (a means) for livelihood to be sustained for future generations. (1991, 5)

In a radical reading of this framing, livelihood can be understood as both the process of enacting life sustenance and the processes by which one is rendered capable of such enactment by others—by the other beings and forces that compose one's *oikos*. This is always a matter of negotiation, of agonistic encounters between multiple human and nonhuman, transient and durable, forces. We might begin to approach a notion of livelihoods here that opens, rather than closes, questions of ecopoietic becoming.

Following this fertile work by Chambers and Conway, SLA has moved in a number of directions at once. On one hand, it has been elaborated to deepen and expand the insights of its originators. De Haan and Zoomers, for example, de-link livelihoods from its Polanyian articulation as *material* sustenance to include a much wider array of relations: “This is not to say that livelihood is not a matter of material well-being,” they write, “but rather that it also includes non-material aspects of well-being. Livelihood should be seen as a dynamic and holistic concept” (2005, 32). Bebbington construes “assets” not just in terms of a passive set of

resources, but as relation connections that enable new forms of action and new etho-ecologies to emerge: “Assets should not be understood only as things that allow survival, adaptation and poverty alleviation: they are also the basis of agents’ power to act and to reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources” (1999, 2022).

On the other hand, however (and sometimes in the hands of the very same people), SLA has moved in a direction that is significantly narrower and more technocratic than the intentions of Chambers and Conway. In the work of Ian Scoones, for example, who developed a key diagram (1998, 4) that was subsequently adopted and modified by numerous development agencies (e.g., DFID 2001; NZAID 2006; Khanya-AIDCC 2006), the “assets” dimension of livelihoods is converted to the language of “capitals” (Scoones 1998). Far from opening the question of assets as a site of multiple ecopoietic articulations, Scoones shrinks the field: “Drawing on an economic metaphor ... livelihood resources may be seen as the ‘capital’ base from which different productive streams are derived from which livelihoods are constructed” (1998, 7). Myriad living relations are thus reduced (quite uncritically) to “natural capital,” “financial capital,” “human capital”, and “social capital” (1998, 7–8).<sup>94</sup> No amount of Bourdieuan apologetics can avoid the sense in which this language is bound up with a hegemonic, economistic articulation that reduces complex, dynamic relations to bundles of objects, potential commodity values,

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94 In a later work, Scoones explains this language in terms of a strategy to remain connected with, and legitimate in the eyes of, the discipline of economics: “In the notionally trans-disciplinary subject area of development, making sense to economists is a must ... In particular, the focus on ‘capitals’ and the ‘asset pentagon’ kept the discussion firmly in the territory of economic analysis” (Scoones 2009, 176–177). While the strategy is somewhat understandable given the power of the hegemonic formation of which economics is a key component, the choice is nonetheless disappointing in its re-performance of a discourse that has worked to undermine the viability of so many livelihoods and habitats.

conceptual oversimplifications, and quantities to be counted and assessed by external standards (Fine 2001; 2010; Mdee 2002).

True to the ethico-political content of the “capitals” notion, a whole field of professional development intervention literature has subsequently developed around SLA in which we are once again presented with individual humans and human “households” navigating—indeed, quite often even rationally optimizing-- “opportunities” via various “strategies” in a field of variably-accessible resources (e.g., DFID 2001; Hamilton-Peach and Townsley 2004; Khanya-AIDCC 2006; Serrat 2008; and see Hussein 2002).<sup>95</sup> Narrowed, in particular, to application among “the poor,” livelihoods becomes a term for various modes of “coping” (Rakodi 2002, 6) in the face of limited access to capital. As a mode of technocratic intervention, it becomes a particular style of government, a coded colonialism that can now intervene in the name of “people-centered development” (DFID 2001, 1) to implement a particular, morally-infused vision of the good life in which the primacy of capitalist markets and human exploitation of a distinct “environment” remain unquestioned. Indeed, one gets two strong impressions while reading the mainstream bulk of SLA literature: first, that it is only “poor” people who have and make livelihoods, only “poor” people who are vulnerable, and only “poor” people who must change (see Brocklesby and Fisher 2003, 194; and Mdee 2002, 17 for similar critiques); and secondly, that some people's livelihoods are more “dependent” on “natural resources” than others (e.g., Scoones 1998, 6)—as if some human communities were exempted from a total dependence on planetary habitat.

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95 Chambers (2005) has noted the profoundly depoliticizing effects of this trend toward individualization of livelihoods.



SLA thus appears to take at least two radically distinct forms: a technocratic developmentalism closely aligned with the hegemonic formation I have sought to challenge throughout this thesis; and a more radically-democratic expression that would move towards an undoing of modernist, capitalist, and (perhaps) even humanist hegemony. Rather than simply dismiss SLA for its first form, as a hopelessly co-opted and corrupted field, I want to build on (my selective, performative reading of) Chambers and Conway and develop some key threads of what can be called the “minor” becomings of SLA.

### **The Ecology of Livelihoods**

In order to move beyond the limitations of the various articulations outlined above, a conceptualization of *ecological livelihoods* is essential. I do not intend the term “ecological” here as a synonym for the “environmental”; nor as a designating a scientific holism or a definite unity which subsumes all (Wood 2010); and nor is it a site of knowledge about an objective set of dynamics and laws to which one might appeal (M. Smith 2011). Indeed, “ecological” in the sense I wish to mobilize it has little to do even with a notion of “nature.” Quite the contrary to all of these options, I follow a thread of ecological thought described briefly towards the end of chapter 6. Ecology can be understood as that which *cannot* be reduced to an environment or nature, contained by a unity, transformed into an object, or mobilized as an ontological court of appeal. It is, in Jean-Francois Lyotard's terms, “the discourse of the secluded ... the thing that has not become public, that has not become communicational, that has not become systemic, and that can never become any of

these things (Lyotard 1993, 202). Or, as Bronislaw Szerszynski summarizes, ecology is “not the name of a totality but of the impossibility of any such totality” (2010, 14). Such a notion is present in Latour's work as well, where “political ecology” designates the very *failure* to “defin[e] the common good of a dehumanized nature” (1998, 228) and instead becomes a site of uncertainty regarding questions of interconnection and ethics. “Is everything interrelated?” he asks, subsequently answering: “Not necessarily. We do not know what is interconnected and woven together (1998, 232). This is what Morton (2010) calls “the ecological thought,” the mind-boggling interdependence that we can never master, never know, and that beckons toward an ethics we have only begun to explore. It is not “a picture of some bounded object,” but rather “a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without any definite center or edge. It is radical intimacy, co-existence with other beings, sentient and otherwise—and how can we so clearly tell the difference?” (Morton 2010, 8).

Ecology, therefore, as the linkage of *oikos* (habitat) to *logos* (reasoned speech), comes to name both an ethical demand and its impossibility. Because our constitutive connections to others proliferate wildly, we are called toward the ethical exposure of these connections and their effects. “The ecological thought,” writes Morton, “thinks big and joins the dots. It comes as close as possible to the strange stranger, generating care and concern for beings, no matter how uncertain we are of their identity, no matter how afraid we are of their existence” (2010, 19). This is the demand of *community* in Nancy and Gibson-Graham's sense described in chapter 7, and it is what much of the science of ecology—in its specificities rather than in its holistic generalization—has in fact responded to. What *is* my connection

to the small frog who is threatened by the development of a new big box store in my town? What is my connection to mercury accumulating in Maine's freshwater ecosystems from rainwater carrying Midwestern power-plant emissions? What is the connection between coal-fired electric generators, people turning on coffee-grinders in Chicago, smallmouth bass laden in toxins in a Maine pond, and communities (human and nonhuman) devastated by mountaintop removal in Appalachia? We must attempt to trace all of these relations and more, because they are all constitutive moments from which our agency emerges and to which it must respond. And yet this is an *impossible task*: it is the very nature of interconnected habitats and their inhabitants that the totality of connections can never be traced or known, much less faced with adequate responses. The *logos* of the *oikos* will be forever present as an active ethical demand and yet also will be forever crossed-out as an impossible one: ~~ecology~~.<sup>96</sup>

### Elements of Ecological Livelihood

A new articulation of livelihoods must carry forward some of the key insights of the previous formulations discussed above: an emphasis on the multiple forms of practice, institution, motivation, and (non)calculation through which humans compose livelihoods; an analysis of the ways in which particular ecopoietic articulations compose and sustain relations of exploitation and oppression; a crucial focus on enhancing human agency in the face of these destructive forces, and on

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<sup>96</sup> With a nod to Derrida (1998). See also the work of Simon Critchley (2007) on the impossible (yet unavoidable) demands of ethical interrelation.

constituting the wider institutional and cultural conditions of possibility for the flourishing of multiple forms of freedom; and a recognition of the more-than-material (in its crude sense of “material base”) nature of livelihoods, highlighting relational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Additionally, it must add some key elements that the radically-democratic force of ecology calls forth. I will briefly sketch five of these.

First, livelihoods must apply to *everyone*—not only to the “rural poor” and to people and communities generally located in the majority world (as “targets” of development), and not even only to humans—but to all living singularities (including collectivities).<sup>97</sup> Even Chambers' attempt, in SLA theory, to develop an ethical articulation of livelihoods needs to be challenged here, for when he proposes that “a sustainable livelihood should not damage but enhance the livelihoods of others ... now and/or in the future” (2005, 202), livelihood remains a human affair. If all living beings compose (and are composed by) livelihoods, then no heterotroph, at least, can avoid damaging the livelihoods of others.<sup>98</sup> As “mortal beings,” writes Donna Haraway, we “live in and through the use of one another's bodies” (2008, 79). No one, honestly at least, can “pretend to live outside killing” (2008, 79). Thus the simplistic normative demand toward non-degradation of others' livelihoods cannot be sustained. It must be shifted, rather, to the level of Stengers' “etho-ecology” (2005a; 2005b; 2010), to the space in which we confront questions about the kinds of

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97 I use the term “singularity” here as an alternative to terms such as “individual” which presume the boundaries of the figure from the outset. Following Jean-Luc Nancy (1991), “singularity” names an entity which in neither necessarily an individual or a group (though it can also be either or both). It is simply a unique entity in the world whose contours can be multiply and variably defined depending on the specific situation.

98 One might argue that many autotrophs, too, require use of the life-force and bodies of others—as, for example, when plant roots take in nutrients released from decomposition processes.

anesthetizations and anti-anesthetizations that disable or enable ethical negotiation. This is Haraway's move when she proposes that the problem is not to impose a moral ban on all killing (an impossible demand), but rather to “learn to live responsibly within the multiplicitous necessity and labor of killing, so as to be in the open, in quest of the capacity to respond in relentless historical, nonteleological, multispecies contingency” (2008, 80). We might alter Chambers' proposal to say that an ethical livelihood (and perhaps a “sustainable” one as well) should not damage but enhance the sensitivity and capacity of singularities to encounter and respond to the multiple interrelations and interdependencies that compose them.

Second, while it may at first appear paradoxical given the previous requirement of a livelihoods articulation applying to “everyone,” ethical conceptualizations of livelihood must avoid generalizations or “major” articulations that attempt to capture and domesticate specificity, difference, and becoming into frames of pre-designated or determined causality and structure. This is to say that “everyone”—every living singularity—enacts a livelihood, but the specificity of this enactment cannot be determined *a priori* or in general. Even Scoones can see that livelihoods requires such localization: “The appeal is simple,” he writes of SLA in its best moments of practice, “look at the real world, and try and understand things from local perspectives. Responses that follow should work with such realities and not try and impose artificial categories and divides on complex realities” (2009, 172). This is not to say that we cannot or should not sometimes attempt to develop accounts of particular patterns, tendencies, or “habits” (Latour 2004a, 86, following C.S. Peirce) that unfold in livelihood practice, but simply that these accounts can never constitute wholes of which particular instances are mere “examples.” They are, rather, *added to* particular assemblages as one more connection that might make

a (new) difference (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Latour 2005).<sup>99</sup> The notion that human beings enact particular optimizing rationalities when confronted with scarcity, for example, cannot insert itself at the level of ontology—as “the way things really are”—but rather must always remain a performative proposition in which its claims cannot be separated from the “reality” they may help to compose. This is because, as William Connolly reminds us, “it is likely that every confident articulation of stable human interests in a specific historical context inadvertently naturalizes some contingent features of the present by treating them as if they conformed to the universal as such” (1995, 33–34). We return, once again then, to “ontological politics” (Connolly 1995; A. Mol 1998; Law 2004), where an ontological suspension of certainty and universality may serve to continually open up space for new becomings.

Third, not only must the dimensions and dynamics of livelihood always escape complete capture by generalization—or “overcoding” in Deleuze and Guattari’s parlance (1987, 8)—but they must also refuse totalizations or reductions via *measurement* (and, I would add, representation in general). As Chambers and Conway have made clear in their version of SLA, livelihoods must be recognized as ultimately incommensurable and immeasurable:

Concepts of wellbeing or deprivation have often been determined by their measureability. Convenience of measuring income or consumption has reinforced the definitions of deprivation as poverty, and of poverty as low income or low consumption. The ideas of

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<sup>99</sup> This is to say, once again following Deleuze and Guattari, that representations of unity, systematicity, or determination do not in fact *represent*. The transcendent object or process they claim to capture is only one more effect (or *affect*) within immanence itself, one more component or affect added on, an “overcoding” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 8). “Transcendence is always a product of immanence,” writes Deleuze (2001, 31). It is, in fact, a question of power and struggle: “The notion of unity ... appears only when there is a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier or a corresponding subjectification” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 8). This formulation is close to Bruno Latour’s notion—likely derived with unacknowledged debt to Deleuze and Guattari—that “the macro is neither ‘above’ nor ‘below’ the interactions, but added to them as another of their connections, feeding them and feeding off of them” (2005, 177).

employment, a job and a workplace are reinforced by the relative ease with which these can be identified and counted ... As professionals, we define as significant whatever we capture and can count in our crude and standard nets ... [Livelihoods] are not easy to measure or estimate; and any attempt to reduce measurement to a single scale or indicator risks doing violence to precisely the complexity and diversity which many rural livelihoods manifest—in themselves, in their relationship with the physical environment, and with each other. (Chambers and Conway 1991, 18, insert added)

Once again, this does not mean that one cannot or should not ever measure, as measurement can be a crucial performative strategy for rendering particular assemblages more visible, durable, and (for better or worse, depending on the case) manageable. It implies, however, that this measurement can never be confused for a “whole” it may claim to represent, and the violence enacted by any measurement and subsequent comparison must always be a site of active ethical response and responsibility. For every measurement produced and every comparison made, one must make a counter-move following Sandra, the economic growth council director: insisting that something has been lost, something violated, and that “really, no. I don't think you can compare” (interview 3).

Fourth, and in a related fashion, livelihood theorization must refuse to accept, *a priori*, the necessity of particular forms, modes, or trajectories of development. One cannot know if livelihoods must involve overcoming something called “poverty” that is granted a seemingly-objective and universal status. One must problematize any mobilization of discourses and strategies that imply necessary (or normatively asserted) movements of *particular* living assemblages in *general* (abstract) directions: growth, improvement, resilience, sustainability. Each of these may all-too-easily code for reproductions of hegemony or, in Vassos Argyrou's terms, “the ability of a group of societies to define the meaning of the world for *everyone, yet again*” (2005, ix, emphasis in original). If development is to be

thought at all within a livelihoods frame, it must be thought as an *event*: “I think we’re seeing a new development here.” The event has nothing to do with the teleological movement of progress that animates the central axis of the hegemonic diagram of power (chapter 4); rather, it indicates the very moment of *poiesis*, the eruption of creation, the actualization of a virtual which is never exhausted (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 156). Let us, indeed, become advocates for this kind of development, which is the very opposite of what development in the “West” has most often been. Development as event is the irruption of radical democracy, a refusal to compromise the force of desire (De vries 2007), the opening of possibility for people, communities, and other assemblages to conserve or transform according to processes in which the outcomes of such composition have not already been determined or decided.

Finally, in the spirit of such a radically-democratic movement, livelihood must be taken out of a techno-managerial frame and transformed into an open-ended, always-revisable, experimental set of tools for enhancing the capacities of collectives to enact forms of life beyond the entrapments of the hegemonic trio. Livelihood frameworks and approaches must, like Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies’ intentions for the subsistence perspective, “enable people to produce and reproduce their own life, to stand on their own feet and to speak in their own voice” (1999, 3). This is not just a conceptual move, and nor is it a move only “on behalf of” those who have been silenced in development, for it entails a fundamental transformation of the relationships between those who would “develop” (or support “development”) and those who would be the subjects of such intervention. Livelihood will only cease to be a techno-managerial practice when it is recognized that the professionals who are paid to “develop,” or at least to promote, implement, or



support schemas such as SLA, must themselves become subjects and participants of development as much as—perhaps even more than—those they work with. Indeed, it would be comic if the tragedy were not so profound: So many professional “developers,” having decided that it was *others* who needed to change, have used their high salaries to participate as good citizens in the most destructive and ethically anesthetized culture of consumption and waste our species has ever enacted. Who needs development—as an event—*really*?

Let me bring this back to Maine: those of us who are concerned about enacting other futures and escaping the zombie clutches of the hegemonic articulation must participate in the development of new livelihoods as members of a collective (or multiple collectives) engaged in self-transformation. To experiment with undoing “poverty” in Maine cannot simply be a matter of examining “measures of economic distress” and developing policies that “target” poor people for “improvement” (e.g., Acheson 2007), but must involve experimentation with undoing the relations of exploitation from which affluence emerges and which forms poverty's conditions of existence. This is to say: those who have the ability to think, write, and act via access to significant wealth and privilege (I am speaking of myself here, among others) must ourselves become sites for intervention. Professional “development” work would thus mean a becoming-vulnerable to the very questions and challenges we are promoting, an *unbecoming-professional* towards a becoming-community in new ways with/as those we work with. This is not a community that would present “us” as a unified or undifferentiated group—one in which we would say “we're all in the same boat”—but rather a community of exposure to the asymmetrical in-common of power relations, exploitations, interdependencies, and inter-complicities. Affluent developers and people

struggling for daily subsistence are not in-community as part of a “human family,” but rather in-community as effectuations of a common diagram of power, participants in a shared assemblage for which all must take radically-differential responsibility. Perhaps more importantly for this project, we are also participants in an assemblage which is becoming-undone, traveling on lines of flight toward other forms of life that we must now struggle, variously yet collectively, to actualize.

## Chapter 9

# Tools for a Politics of Ecological Livelihood

To be one is always to *become with* many. (Haraway 2008, 4)

The five elements I have outlined in the previous chapter are, of course, only a beginning. To construct a politics of ecological livelihood that is capable of displacing the centrality of the hegemonic trio in struggles over collective futures in Maine, we must rearticulate current conflicts in different terms, offer framings that amplify existing counter-hegemonic desires and lines of flight, and develop tools that can make new kinds of sense out of the complexities of livelihood negotiation. What might these languages and tools look like? As I near the conclusion of this project, I can only begin to suggest some possible directions that such development might take. In this final chapter, I offer a series of brief and preliminary sketches of three constellations of concepts that might merit further development and experimentation in the work of composing a politics of ecological livelihood in Maine and elsewhere: a *livelihoods triad*, concepts of *the commoning and uncommoning of habitat(s)*, and a series of ten *coordinates of ethical livelihood negotiation*. The livelihoods triad attempts to further flesh out a core multi-dimensional concept of livelihoods beyond the simple notion of “making a living”; the concepts of commoning and uncommoning seek to elaborate on Stengers' “etho-ecology” in the context of a livelihoods engagement; and the coordinates of ethical livelihood negotiation attempt to open a wide space for re-formatting—with

specificity that the hegemonic trio cannot offer—particular struggles over the shapes and trajectories of livelihood(s) in Maine. Taken together, these various concepts might begin to constitute a rudimentary “toolbox” for an experimental politics of ecological livelihood.

### The Livelihoods Triad

In the existing livelihood articulations described in chapter 8, the focus remains fixed on the (primarily human) labor of *making a living*, whether this is thwarted by various constraints, captured by various forces of exploitation, or enhanced by various resources and forms of agency. In such a frame, it is almost inevitable that something like an “environment” will remain intact as an externalized source and sink, and that a “society” will continue to stand as an aggregate catch-all for those dynamics that exceed the individual or household but cannot be reduced to an environment or “nature.” Moreover, the image associated with livelihoods as (only) making a living may all-too-readily remain tied to variations of the rational, optimizing, even self-interested individual. To ward off these forms of re-capture, we need to be able to speak of livelihood in ways that acknowledge and expand forms of agency while also refusing to affirm a lone human subject as standing, pre-made and presumed, at the center of a world of objects and objective dynamics.

What stands at the “center” instead, I propose, is not a subject or an object—indeed, not a thing of any kind at all—but an *encounter*. Living singularities, in whatever forms they may take in different ecopoietic regimes, can be viewed as

effects of the ongoing convergence of three dimensions or processes: *making* one's living, having one's living *made* by others (human and nonhuman), and making livings *for* others (Figure 20). Everyone, in various ways, works to make a living (autopoiesis), is dependent on others for their living (allopoiesis), and participates in making the lives of others possible (alterpoiesis). Each of these moments are inescapable, and each are split by the always-open questions of that which we can know, that which we can intervene in, and that which utterly exceeds us.

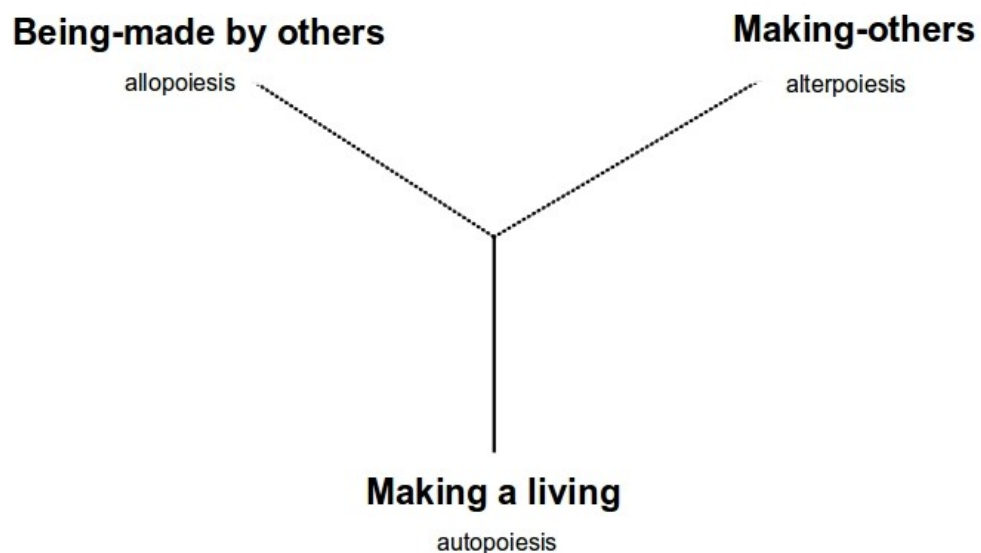


Figure 20. Ecological livelihoods: making, being-made, and making-others.

The dimension of *making a living* involves the active work of seeking, procuring, and producing the means of sustenance. This is the enactment of “living labor” in the Marxian sense, the site of agency in which a subject exercises particular forms of perception, skill, knowledge, and power to engage a world that it also participates in making. Making a living is, first and foremost, self-production or, as I described briefly in chapter 7, “autopoiesis” (Maturana and Varela 1980): the

ongoing production of relatively-stable forms of living organization—including patterns of *meaning*—from flows of energy and matter. It is *ecopoiesis* enacted at/as the emergence of a “self,” an identity, a living singularity (which, once again, can be an individual, a group, a region, or any other such entity). This self-making is a matter of composing relations of “mediators” (Latour 1999; 2005), various forms of embodiment, capacitation, and enhancement that link one thing to another in chains of action. To eat, for example, is a matter of particular perceptive apparatuses (eyes, noses, molecular receptors, cilia, etc.) forming a relation with other entities that may become “food” if other mediators of knowledge, memory, embodied response, and means of intake and digestion are all lined up (Farina and Belgrano 2006; Farina and Napoletano 2010; Farina 2011). To make a living is to assemble networks of mediators; to fail to make this assembly, or to be thwarted by other forces, is to risk suffering or death.

It is not the case, however, that there is a pre-existing entity that exercises (or fails to exercise) the powers of this assembly. We might say, rather, that an ongoing assembly of multiple kinds of mediators *takes place* and that it is this “taking place” that marks the emergence of a self-making that can only be retroactively ascribed to the being which is made. Agency, in this way, is “distributed” (Bennett 2010) as an emergent property of a collective *making* which composes its own locus. Key ethical and political questions of this dimension include: What actions and strategies become available to a self-making singularity (a Maine family, a rural Maine community, the state itself) in a given habitat (*oikos*)? What possibilities might be made available but are blocked or hindered by particular forces or relations? How do desires for different forms of action emerge

and how are they acted upon or thwarted? To what extent does a given proposition or articulation open up possibilities for the increase of agential expression, for whom, in what collective combinations, and at what costs to others?

While the agency and self-making power that emerges in the dimension of making a living is crucial, its over-emphasis risks reinscribing an impossible normative demand toward a notion of autonomy that we need to confront and transform (Whatmore 1997, and see critiques of the normative demand toward “self-sufficiency” in chapter 3). As our increasingly-visible interdependencies with a more-than-human living world make clear, we are all *utterly dependent* on beings and forces that exceed us. We are *made by others* in a dimension that can also be called “allopoiesis” (*allo*, from the outside). I draw this term from Maturana, Varela and Uribe (1974) who contrast it with autopoiesis as the production and maintenance of a system's organization from forces outside that system. Autopoiesis and allopoiesis are not, however, mutually exclusive dynamics. As microbiologist Scott Gilbert (2013) argues, building on the work of Lynn Margulis (1981; 1999), dependence on relations with others is a constitutive property of life itself. No autopoiesis without allopoiesis: prior to any making of a living, we must be *given* one.<sup>100</sup> We are all on the dole. In one sense, being-made involves various relations by which others “provide” energy, matter, and meaning that sustain us. Prominent examples in the human domain include birth, parenting, language acquisition, support in times of sickness, physical nourishment and the beings that produce (or embody) it, and those from whom our money comes (whether via

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100 To be precise, there may be allopoiesis without autopoiesis, as when particular relations of mass and gravity compose a durable body of rock in space, but this does not work the other way around. All autopoietic entities are also, at the same time, allopoietic.

simple exchange, our own exploitation, or our exploitation of others). The discourse of “ecosystem services,” increasingly common in Maine as an attempt to value more-than-human constitutive relations in terms often amenable to the hegemonic articulation (Moore, Gunn, and Troy 2012; Troy 2012), also names key relations of being-made. Sue Jackson and Lisa Palmer propose to re-signify and re-orient this discourse toward “a relational ethic of care and responsibility” by focusing on concrete, constitutive relations of “communicative reciprocity within and across human–non-human realms” (2014, 2).<sup>101</sup>

Being-made is not just about the provision of materials that feed autopoiesis; it also names what Elizabeth Grosz calls the “non-normative imperatives of an outside that weighs on individuals and groups, in ways that they cannot control but are implicated in and are effects of” (2005, 51). The *allo* may be parents, friends, bosses, exploited employees, or the living beings who become our food, but it is also gravity, genetic variety, the emergent properties of myriad forms of energy and matter that not only produce limits to action, but also incite it, provoke it, and constitute its conditions of possibility (Grosz 2005, 43–44). To recognize our being-made, and the being-made of all that is actualized in our world(s), is to foreground a constitutive dependence that simultaneously demands reciprocity and utterly exceeds any possibility of it. What does it mean to be alive and capable of limited yet precious action—that is, to embody *response-ability*—in the presence of a creation that can never be mastered?<sup>102</sup>

101 A similar though somewhat less conceptually developed proposal for rethinking ecosystem services is made by Turnhout et. al. (2013).

102 One can glimpse, in the presence of such a question, how religious fundamentalisms may seem so appealing in a moment when the hegemonic trio is coming unraveled as a compelling map for collective life. In a sense, the trio has insulated us from confronting the profoundly spiritual questions that lie beneath our quotidian political struggles by banishing “God” to a separate sphere. One dimension of the “anthropocene,” however, may be an exposure of hubris and a growing confrontation with the forces of creation beyond us. In the face of such exposure, it is



A whole host of ethical questions are opened up here, since we do not even know with whom we are connected (Latour 1998). How might we render our interdependencies more visible while also recognizing the impossibility of any complete accounting? What forms of responsibility can we construct towards the myriad others (beings, places, times) whose bodies and worlds are shaped by the “makings” that we take and receive from them? How do we gain, as the well-known “serenity prayer” has it (Niebuhr 1987, 251), the wisdom to discern the difference between those dependencies that can be transformed and those to which we are truly at the mercy?<sup>103</sup>

The third dimension of the livelihoods triad, that of *making-others*, entails “us” (whoever we may be) standing in the very position of those others whom we are made by, acting ourselves as forces of creation. So much of the energies of self-making are, in fact, oriented toward making livings *for* others. I call this dimension “alterpoiesis” (*alter* as in other).<sup>104</sup> In some cases, it takes the form of involuntary relations: exploitation in capitalist firms that provides surplus for owners at the expense of producers, playing host to (other kinds of) parasites, or becoming compost when we die. In other cases, making-others forms a core part of the intention or vector of agency of a living being: giving birth, raising children, contributing to the sustenance of various collectivities, caring for places and things, supporting elders and others, and enacting solidarities.

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all-too-tempting to fall back on forms of religious certainty that, once again, might insulate or anesthetize us from the ethical demands of the present.

103 As the prayer goes: “God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.” I would only add that courage must include the fortitude to relentlessly experiment with—and participate in transforming—the *line* between that which can and cannot be changed.

104 “Alterpoiesis” is my own neologism for making others, intended to complete the triad in terms that beckon to the larger process of ecopoiesis that these dimension, together, constitute.

The making of others is not reducible either to altruism—“because I care”—or to instrumentalism—“if I care for you, you’ll care for me”—precisely because of the ecological nature of livelihood relations. One may not ever know if one’s making of others will help to make oneself in turn; and indeed, where are the boundaries of this self in a context in which we emerge at the very intersection of an *auto*, an *allo*, and an *alter*? As Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber (2012) reminds us in their work on symbiosis and the collective emergence of the self, “we have never been individuals.” Key ethical questions in this dimension of making-others include: To whom are we obliged, called, or pulled to offer ourselves, our energies, and our lives? To what extent are these relations shaped by forms of coercion and violence, and to what extent can we transform such relations? How are our makings-of-others connected with our being-made, recirculating energies and matter in ways that maintain our habitats and those of others, and to what extent is this connection severed by various extractive mediations?

This schema of making, being-made, and making-others is, ironically, another trio, but as a *triadic relation* it is radically different from the geometry that characterizes the hegemonic formation.<sup>105</sup> This livelihoods triad cannot be turned into a triangle, a Venn diagram, or a series of nested spheres without isolating, de-animating, or freezing the dynamic relations it is intended to foreground. Indeed, no term can stand alone and nor can it be connected to another without passing

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105 While the work of Charles Sanders Peirce (1955) has not been explicitly present in this thesis, it has certainly inspired my mobilization of the triadic relation. Peirce’s ontology is articulated in terms of a triad: firstness (roughly corresponding to what I have been calling the virtual); secondness (roughly the actual); and thirdness (roughly the territorialized assemblage, or “habit”). It is the dynamic relation between the three that animates the concept, and no element can be isolated from the other without undoing the power of the diagram as a whole. While my three dimensions of ecological livelihood do not correspond directly to Peirce’s triad, the diagrammatic structure is intended to function in a similar way. Detailed exploration of the possible relation between my triad and that of Peirce (or, rather those of Peirce, as they proliferate in his work) may be a fertile avenue for future exploration.

through the point of encounter and emergence at the heart of the diagram. Being-made by others emerges only in relation to that which is made; making a living is only made possible in its relation to being-made; and making a living stands as a relative *relay* between two realms of making (poiesis) that require its connection or mediation. One's making of others becomes, for those others, the dynamic of being-made. "I" and "we" emerge as a site of continually-enacted agential articulation between a habitat that makes us and the habitats of others that we participate in making.

This triad is not, to be clear, intended as ontological totalization that diagrams the structure of life itself; rather it is a strategic figure, a tool for encountering and engaging, a small machine intended to generate questions and connections. In contrast with the *prism* of chapter 4 that acted as an ontologizing device to actualize the hegemonic trio, we can think of the livelihoods triad in terms of a *kaleidoscope*. It is a machine designed, as its Greek etymology describes, to compose "beautiful essences" for a viewer (καλός, *beautiful* + εἶδος, *form* or *essence* + σκοπεῖν, *to look at*, Oxford English Dictionary 2008d). Rather than presenting things as they "really" are, as if from a "God's eye view" (Putnam 1981; Haraway 1991), the kaleidoscope is an overt assemblage of viewer-instrument-light-image-world that diffracts, simplifies, and multiplies all at once to transform a particular scene, for a particular participant, into a momentarily stabilized "beautiful essence." Imagine, then, that this livelihood triad is composed by an act of situated engagement, always laden with power (as Haraway 1991, 192 crucially reminds us). It appears to the "eye," peering down the column of the instrument, as one figure among many that together form a dynamic, whirling web of converging and diverging lines, the "whole" of which can never be grasped.

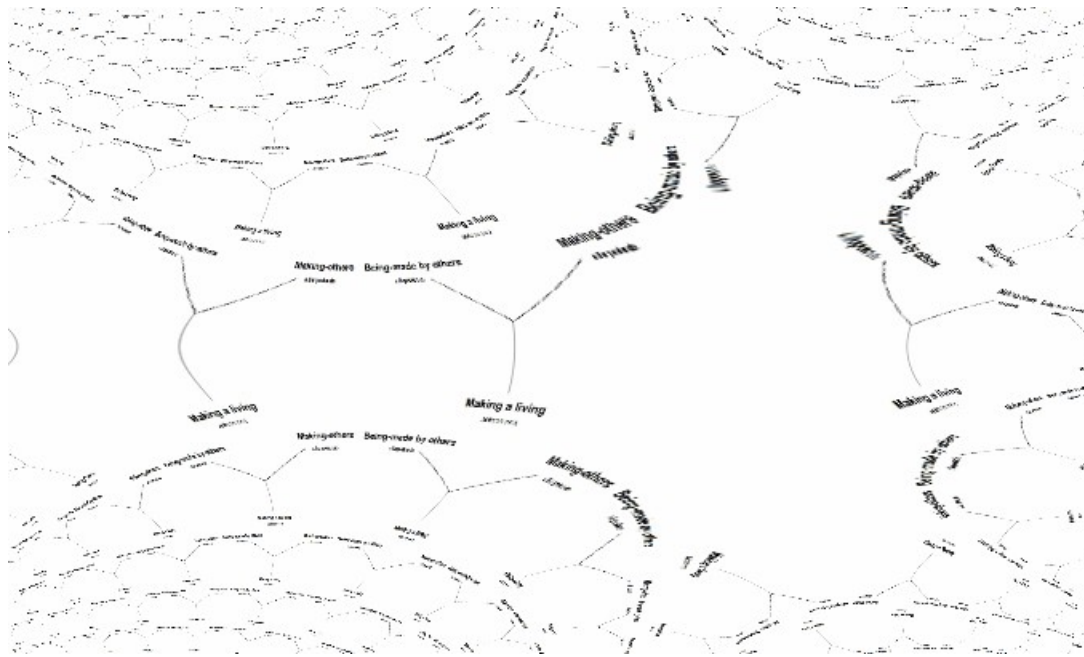


Figure 21. The mesh of livelihood relations.

A single triad, therefore, never stands alone but is always already on the way to becoming part of another triad (figure 21). “I” and “we” become relays in a complex ecological meshwork (Morton 2010), and a politics of the negotiation of ecological livelihoods unfolds here. *Life is the negotiation of multiple, overlapping, distinct, co-constitutive habitats*. Or, in Haraway's terms, “we are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down” (2008, 42). Here we are, then: the very effects of multiple encounter(s) between being-made, making, and making others, nodes in a complex mesh of intersecting and overlapping livelihood assemblages unfolding in various relations of conflict, synergy, and indifference. As Morton puns, “*What a fine mesh we've gotten ourselves into*” (2010, 61). Since we cannot get ourselves out, we must, as the impossible task of ecology demands, go *in*.

What further concepts and practices are needed to face this complexity? How can we engage the (impossible) work of accounting for our interrelations and interdependencies and taking responsibility—as we are able, and as we might become able—for their effects? How do we care for our affects and their effects, fostering new (and old) etho-ecologies that enable and enhance creative action and ethical connection in a “world of becoming” (Connolly 2011)? I propose to conceptualize these very questions—ethical negotiations at multiple sites of livelihood encounter—in terms of “commoning” and “uncommoning.”

### Commoning and Uncommoning

A robust literature on the concept and practice of “commons” has flourished in recent years, most often focusing on the myriad ways in which human communities make, share, and care for pools of collective, material and immaterial resources (e.g., Bollier 2002; Bollier and Helfrich 2012; Barnes 2006; Dolsak and Ostrom 2003; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013). It is not possible, given the scope of my current project, for me to review or even substantially engage this literature. I would like to riff on it nonetheless, drawing from and building, in particular, on the way in which some scholar-activists are transforming commons from noun to *verb*. De Angelis (2010) in particular, following the work of Peter Linebaugh (2008), proposes that a commons must be continually constituted by practices and processes of *commoning*. “There are no commons,” he writes, “without incessant activities of commoning, of (re)producing in common” (De Angelis 2010, 955). This commoning involves various forms of collective intervention in flows of

matter, energy, and meaning that themselves compose the collective, and it entails the collective construction and maintenance of particular boundaries, values, habits, and institutions that enact an ongoing caring for that which is becoming-common.

I would like to transpose this notion of commoning into the register of livelihoods and the livelihoods triad. In such a context, commoning can be conceptualized as a term for the myriad ways in which complex habitat relations of livelihood are rendered into *explicit sites of ethical negotiation*. It is the shared space of mutual exposure that is constituted where living singularities take responsibility and/or actively respond to the ethical questions posed by specific instances of an ontological in-common.<sup>106</sup> This is to say that commoning constitutes shared “matters of concern” (Latour 2005, 114), where “matter” should be taken in both senses of the word at once. It is not that *all things shared* are commoned, but that all shared matters are commoned to the extent that they appear as questions, concerns, or sites of struggle. Gravity, for example, is a shared condition of existence for all, but it would not (yet) constitute a site of commoning for beings other than certain physicists and their attachments until such a time that someone were to develop an anti-gravity machine that would render the common into a site of explicit *negotiation*. The climate of the planet has constituted a shared field of experience for humans and other organisms since their evolutionary emergence; yet the climate only becomes a site of (potential) commoning when certain humans become aware of their active role in undermining its recent, relative stability (e.g.,

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106 It is important to distinguish three concepts that are often mixed up in social theory: the common, commoning, and commons. The common, in my articulation here, is the shared ontological condition of being-with that is the focus of much of Jean-Luc Nancy's work referenced in chapter 7. Commoning is the rendering-explicit of particular instances of the in-common as they become shared matters of concern. The commons, then, is that which is constituted in and through commonings, the shared matter—including habits, values, and institutions—around and toward which concern has been oriented.

Dumanoski 2009) and begin to experience this climate as a site of ethical and political engagement.

Commoning unfolds, then, as the composition of an innumerable set of variable “spheres” of concern and negotiation that articulate livelihood triads together in explicitly-common habitat assemblages. It is the site where *oikoi* overlap, converge, and enter into forms of material-semiotic negotiation (figure 22). It is often a boundary-drawing site, an enclosure, since it entails particular participants and not others, particular negotiated settlements and stalemates that must often be bounded in order to remain stable. Thus commoning cannot be contrasted—as it often is—with enclosure.<sup>107</sup> This is to say that while some

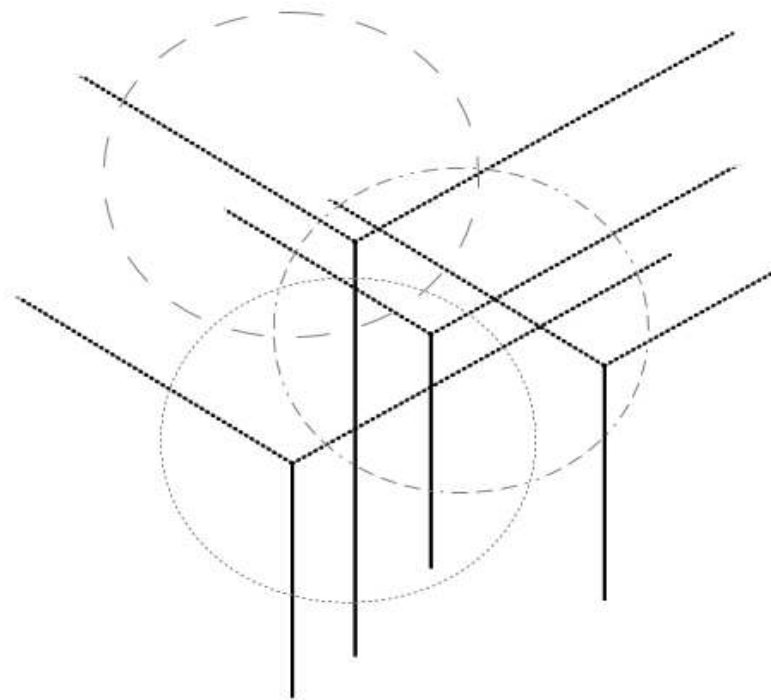


Figure 22. Overlapping commonings of livelihood relations.

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<sup>107</sup> A similar point about avoiding the opposition of commons and enclosure is made by David Harvey (2012, 70).

enclosures disrupt and destroy commons, others actually *constitute* them. The ethico-political question must shift from “commons vs. enclosure” to: *what enclosure, for whom, for what purpose, and to what effect?* It matters a great deal which *side* of a given enclosure one ends up standing on.

For clarity's sake, I suggest that we oppose processes of commoning with those of *uncommoning*. If commoning is a making-explicit of the negotiations of the common, then uncommoning is an anesthetization of the common, an ethical closure, or a rendering-non-negotiable of habitat relations.<sup>108</sup> Uncommoning is not a *non-common*, since being-in-common itself cannot be undone as a shared condition of existence (Nancy 1991; 2000), and nor does it always entail the destruction of commons. Uncommoning is, in a strange way, still an articulation of the common and even a production of commons (that is, of shared matters of concern), but this production is *alienated* or estranged in the Marxian sense (Marx 1964): dispossessed, in varying degrees, of the means of encounter, negotiation, and response-ability. The conventional capitalist factory is a space of the common, of a shared existence for those who work there, but until workers organize to challenge or rupture capitalist discipline, it remains an *uncommoned common*, or a *common site of uncommoning*.

If this all seems quite abstract, let us return briefly to Maine and to the problem of the hegemonic articulation and its supersession. While economy, society, and environment do constitute various kinds of commons—markets, regulatory institutions, social norms, statistical representations, social funds, pools of natural resources and amenities upon which many rely—I have described in

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108 We could speak, then, of particular *commoning enclosures* and of *uncommoning enclosures*.



previous chapters many of the ways in which these articulations enact uncommonings. Whether via relations that subordinate Maine people to “market forces,” that enforce majoritarian norms of (economistic) human agency and subjectivity, or that isolate human subjects from a more-than-human living world rendered into objects or environment, these modes of the in-common cut across and through our constitutive interrelations and render their radically-democratic ethical negotiation difficult. They are sites of the uncommoned common, that which is in some sense shared yet rendered non-negotiable. They are enclosures in which those who share (or who should share) them are locked out from the prospects of a genuine *commoning*. This language of “commoning”—and of “commoners” (those who common)—might help to bring to the fore a more robust politics of ethical exposure not only around questions of more obvious commons such as fisheries, aquifers, and atmosphere, but also around commons of ecopoietic articulation itself: modes of representing, measuring, and instituting that might remain in-common but otherwise insulated from transformative livelihood struggle.

### **Coordinates of Ethical Livelihood Negotiation**

What, then, is negotiated at the nexus of livelihood compositions? What are some of the key sites in Maine where processes of commoning and uncommoning unfold? To ask this differently: If we are not simply negotiating the relations between economy, society, and environment, what are we negotiating? How might we be able to see livelihood struggles differently so that ethical exposures are increased and new ethico-political becomings enabled? How might theory help us

to common anew? I could draw from many sources to engage such questions, but I will return here to the heart of my thesis: the articulations of my interviewees.<sup>109</sup> When I read these interviews with an eye for transversal sites of commoning and uncommoning, I find them proliferating: multiple ways in which livelihoods and habitats are negotiated, rendered seemingly non-negotiable, and contested in the name of new negotiations. I follow De Angelis (2003) and Gibson-Graham (2006) in calling these sites “coordinates” to designate their nature as orienting sites of exploration and engagement rather than as pre-defined principles or moral judgments. A set of “coordinates of ethical negotiation,” such as those initially developed by Gibson-Graham in *A Postcapitalist Politics* (2006) and later elaborated and transformed by her and others (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham 2009; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013; Gibson-Graham and Miller 2015), further opens “a space of decision that might alert us to (at least something of) what is at stake in attempting to practice ... being-in-common” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 99).

To propose a non-exhaustive list of the coordinates that emerged from my interviews, I will briefly outline ten in the remainder of this chapter. If these coordinates seem fragmented and somewhat “random” this is because they are a collection of articulations taken from the multiple, diverse contexts in which my interviewees are working. One could imagine another approach to identifying coordinates that would take a particular struggle—the Plum Creek development controversy, for example (chapter 3)—and attempt to “map” the diverse sites of

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<sup>109</sup> I considered, for example, building on Latour's schema of collective composition from *Politics of Nature* (2004). This would be an interesting direction to pursue, in part because it is clear that some of the coordinates I identify below can be mapped onto Latour's “tasks.” This is for another project, however.

struggle and negotiation that are present beyond the conventional articulations of dynamics between “economy,” “society,” and “environment.” Such work is for another project (though I will draw on the case of Plum Creek below), but the coordinates outlined below might constitute a useful starting point for this kind of (re)compositional research. I will proceed now to describe ethical livelihood negotiations around questions of: constituency, value(s), measurement and comparison, performances of the “whole,” knowledge and uncertainty, needs and strategies, health and well-being, limits and sufficiency, “incentives” and ecologies of practice, and place, time, and habitat(s).

### *1. Constituency*

When Sandra suggested that “quality of life” must be “for our rivers and for our fish and the animals” (interview 3), she was scrambling the conventional solution to the question of who counts as part of “the economy” and who is relegated to an “environment.” Similarly, when Oscar proposed that “economic infrastructure” must include not only “roads, bridges, highways, [and] sewage systems,” but also “the capacity to sustain social interaction ... which would include ecology” (interview 13), he introduced a profound instability at the heart of the hegemonic articulation. Livelihoods are constituted by *all kinds* of relations and attachments, and no “economic,” “social,” or “environmental” controversy can avoid the emergence of multiple interested parties, attached via myriad motivations and energies, to multiple common and obscure beings. When asked, for example, about whether the widespread discourse of “quality of place” included elements that did

not directly contribute to scenic amenity values for the creative class, Oscar noted that “there are always smaller things. There's always a group of people who are focused on the preservation of the small things, whether it's birdwatchers or salamander preservers or people who want to harvest ... the little ferns ... *there's always a constituency for that*” (interview 13, emphasis added).<sup>110</sup>

These multiple constituencies are, crucially, *internal* to livelihood composition (even if they were external to “the economy”) as key elements of the triad of making, being-made, and making-others. The “little ferns” to which Oscar referred, for example, are fiddleheads (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*), an important traditional rural Maine food collected for subsistence and for market in the early spring. Are birds and salamanders any less crucial? This is the very question at stake in the coordinate of constituency: Given that we are constituted by immense and complex interdependencies, and that we do not really know who or what we “really” need, which beings will be allowed to participate as crucial elements of public negotiations regarding the ongoing provisional outcomes of a particular ecopoiesis? Who or what shall count as a legitimate participant in the dynamics of livelihood and habitat composition? What beings will be excluded and why? This is one of the most crucial points of (non)negotiation in debates over economic development projects and environmental protection initiatives, but one that is often disguised by hegemonic framings. We can explore this coordinate more specifically in two dimensions: the question of *participants* and that of *practices*.

Regarding participants, let us look at an example. Those fighting for “the environment” in Maine are often contending that other species and their

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<sup>110</sup> It is from Oscar (interview 13) that I derived my term for this coordinate, though I also intend it to generate some resonance (even if wholly undeveloped here) with notions of “constituent power” in the work of some autonomist Marxists (e.g., Negri 1999; Shukaitis and Graeber 2007).

ecosystems should be considered as legitimate participants in ecopoietic processes. In the struggle over the Plum Creek corporation's rezoning proposal, described at the opening of chapter 3, one key dimension of conflict was whether entities such as the threatened Canada Lynx, the Least Bittern, the Rusty Blackbird, the planet's changing climate system, the specter of peak oil, and hikers in search of “primitive wilderness experience,” among other beings, should count or matter in public deliberation over economic development. Some challenged such an inclusion as illegitimate over fears that this proliferation of recognized entities would eclipse the robust participation of “local people” who needed “jobs.” Others feared more generally that the God-given rights of “private property owners” were threatened by the entire debate. In all cases, the struggle was at least in part about who or what gets to count in the composition of livelihoods—and, indeed, *whose livelihoods should matter*. It is not the case that, on one hand, there are certain things that provide “us” with what “we” need (Plum Creek offering employment), while, on the other, there are “mere preferences” (protecting Lynx habitat) or “special interests” (addressing climate change). Rather it is a question of commoning and uncommoning, of whether a given process will open itself and its already-present participants toward the question of constituency, and then of which constitutive beings will appear as viable *commoners* and which will be excluded from the process (yet remain in-common and estranged).

The question of practices is equally crucial. What activities, processes and relationships are permitted to appear as legitimate contributors to livelihood composition in public debate? If a conventional articulation of “the economy” reduces livelihood to paid employment in capitalist firms, a whole host of other articulations that I have already outlined challenge this narrowing of the field of

view. To repeat the list from chapter 4, my interviewees variously recognized the existence of hunting, fishing, trapping, foraging, home gardening, barter, gifting, parenting, housework, informal marketing of subsistence surplus, government redistributions, voluntary reduction of consumption needs, worker- and community-owned cooperative businesses, caring for land and waters, and the work of “ecosystem services” as some of the many ways that Maine people compose (and are composed by) habitat. The key question, of course, is whether these practices are to be recognized as legitimate *enough* contributors to livelihood composition to appear as valuable, viable, or desirable dimensions of a regional development process.

## 2. *Value(s)*

How do we decide, amidst the proliferation of constituencies, what and who is important? The coordinate of value(s) involves an engagement with the multiple ways in which we generate and sustain relations of signification and care with regard to various elements of ecopoietic processes. What do we care about? What matters? And, at least in some cases, what matters more than other things? In the hegemonic frame of “the economy,” valuation is enacted via a monetary index, a rendering-commensurable of all beings and relations in such a way that they can be ranked and compared. “You’ve got to be able to come up with some sort of apples-to-apples comparison to be able to make a valid decision,” said Kathleen, the government statistician (interview 5). The problem, of course, is that livelihood is not reducible to these commensurate terms and in order to make it appear as such it

must be overcoded—taken over via a kind of metrological colonization by conceptual, monetizing acrobatics such as “replacement value” (e.g., Byström 2000), “willingness to pay” evaluations (e.g., Carlsson and Johansson-Stenman 2000), and estimates of “existence value” (e.g., Spring and Kennedy 2005). Kathleen recognized that “it’s hard to assign a dollar figure to ‘I feel better when I have a pretty thing to look at’” (interview 5), and yet because the *question of value(s) itself* is not commonly viewed a public coordinate of negotiation (rather, it is already decided that “economic value” is essential for rational decision-making), she remained trapped in a regime of quantitative cost-benefit analysis and, more generally, in the regime of “the economy” and its accompanying categories.

As John McMurty (1998; 2002; 2003) argues, economic value is not an objective, non-normative measure distinct from “social values” (as in, for example, Blaug 1997, 700) but is a particular “value practice” (De Angelis 2007, 24) through which social norms and power relations are continually instituted. As one ecopoietic articulation among others, the rendering of beings and relation in monetary terms is a question of *ethics*: What does this practice (and institution) of making-valuable enable and foreclose? What does it common and uncommon? Even more crucially, what are other modes of valuation that are enacted within, alongside, and against it? What do (or might) they enable and foreclose? As Calvin, director of an economic development think-tank asserted:

I would maintain that if you use census data around poverty in Maine you're missing the point that there are a lot of people that might be considered to be in poverty who are actually living, not great lives, but they're not they don't consider themselves poor. Because ... they're living in a value system that's different than the national census value system, you know. (interview 4)

Struggles posed as conflicts between the hegemonic categories may often, and perhaps *should* more often, be struggles over multiple modes of value: “There is conflict. Between different values and priorities,” said Dana the environmental nonprofit director (interview 25). Linked with the coordinate of constituency, we can see that this is not a matter of prioritizing economy, society, or environment, but rather of valuing complex relations. It is about the commoning of the three dimensions of the livelihood triad.

To return again to the example of Plum Creek: It is not at all the case that this struggle can be reduced to a battle between groups who placed “economy” and “environment” in different rank orders. Indeed, every party involved in the controversy took up as a core concern the creation of viable livelihoods in the region and enacted this concern via economic development proposals (e.g., Colgan 2007; Kellett and St. Pierre 1996; Didisheim and De Wan 2006). What was at issue, at least in part, were the radically-different forms of valuation that these proposals demanded.<sup>111</sup> While experts debated about whether the Plum Creek plan would be “good for the economy,” a much more unsettling and fertile—yet much more marginalized—struggle was unfolding over *contending articulations and rankings of what truly matters*. What unexpected alliances and betrayals might have been enabled if the deliberation had set up spaces in which these complex value struggles were foregrounded, de-linked from the “golden orbs of value” of the hegemonic categories (Irene, interview 16), and even scrambled? Might it have become more clear, for example, that some “environmental” groups were concerned about the most basic, practical, and immediate needs of human livelihood in northern Maine,

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<sup>111</sup> Not to mention the ways in which the hegemony of economic value influenced the shape of the proposal available.



and that some “economic” groups were, in fact, most concerned about maintaining an allegiance to particular abstract causal models linking quantitative regional growth (and corporate profits) with aggregate income statistics?

### *3. Measurement and Comparison*

The question of value(s) is intimately connected with another key coordinate: that of measurement and comparison. On one hand, I heard Kathleen, the statistician, asserting that standard measurement is necessary because we need to be able to compare things: “When people want to know how the economy is doing, it's either because they want to know how we compare to someone else, or they want to know how we're doing compared to a different point in time” (interview 5). Thus an acknowledged simplification such as GDP is justified “because we need to have something to look at” (interview 5). On the other hand, Sandra (the economic growth council director) forcefully expressed her opposition to such measurement and comparison: “So really, no. I don't think you can compare (interview 3). Eric, the regional development economist, meanwhile reminded me that “Measurement increases precision, but creates its own distortion” (interview 1). All of these articulations came from prominent experts within the field of economic development. What are we to make of this other than to say that it is not a matter of simply “looking at the hard numbers” (Owen, interview 2) to see what they “say,” but of the very *question* of numbers and their mobilization as technologies of indexing, valuation, and comparison?

The first key struggle of this coordinate involves whether a measurement

can even be produced, and—if it is—what forms of exclusion and violence this production entails. This is the question of the “value beyond measure” of natural beauty and the “services” that come to us from others (Maine Land Trust Network 2005, 2) and how it confronts demands for quantification. As Brenda, the social service researcher, described of Maine: “We have this natural beauty and a kid can go outside and be *healed* in a way, by taking a walk in the woods or on the beach. And so that piece, isn't measured, and it's not really measurable. We don't have an indicator for that” (interview 31). And yet people want “hard numbers” (Owen, interview 2) and institutions demand quantifications as strategies for governing people, things, and spaces (Rose 1999; Rose and Miller 2008). A commoning of measurement would begin at the very site of its emergence: struggles to institute the immeasurability of multiple beings and becomings, to render visible the exclusions produced by existing measurements, and to continually struggle over questions of who measures, for what purposes, and to what effects.

With measurement, however, negotiation at this coordinate is not exhausted. One may (or may not) measure, but can measurements be *compared*? This is the question of (in)commensurability raised by Sandra and described toward the end of chapter 7. In the hegemonic articulation, where economic value has center stage as an “objective” mode of measure, the answer is *yes*: everything can and must be compared. “You've got to be able to come up with some sort of apples-to-apples comparison to be able to make a valid decision,” said Kathleen (interview 5). As a coordinate of ethical negotiation, however, the question remains open as a site of overt struggle: one must not simply seek to show that a given proposal to protect an ecosystem, save a population of endangered birds, or restrict the use of toxic chemicals can generate measurable “economic prosperity,” but rather *one must fight*

*for the space to refuse this standard.* Commoning at the coordinate of measurement and comparison is thus to struggle against majoritizing forces of all kinds that continually institute standards against which all beings must be compared and into which all becomings must be (impossibly) assimilated.

#### 4. *Performing the Whole*

Aside from rendering comparisons possible, measurement feeds into another key coordinate of livelihood negotiation: that of the articulation of “wholes,” the making of what Latour calls “scenarizations” (2004a, 137) or “panoramas” (2005, 185). Easily confused with the actual—impossible to capture—whole that it purports to describe, the scenarization is, in fact, best engaged as a self-consciously *non-total totalization*. It enables a story about “the big picture,” and thus serves particular processes of performative composition, while also cultivating awareness of itself *as a picture*. When Kathleen told me that “there is no, sort of, 'economy' sitting under my desk” (interview 2), as a way to describe “the economy” as a mere accounting convention, she was missing the sense in which this economy *is*, in fact, under her desk—in boxes of printed reports generated by his department to show people what “the economy” is made of. She described:

We've done some presentations where we try to boil it down to: OK, here's Maine's economy, and there's this little triangle of consumers, businesses, and government and, you know, directional arrows going back and forth. And that's sorta the absolute bare minimum simplest way to think about it, where you have people who work in businesses, and businesses pay wages, and people pay taxes and get government services, and they also buy things from these businesses, and businesses pay taxes and get services. (interview 2)

At the very same time, she acknowledged that such an image “leav[es] out all of the

complicated bits” (interview 2). It helps to structure action, to advocate for certain strategies or pathways of composition and not others, but it is also clearly limited.

The coordinate of scenarization enables us to shift from the assumption of a set of spheres to which various big-picture representations more or less correspond, to the very question of the partial composition of images of the whole. What is included and excluded in a given scenarization? What does a given scenarization enable us to do or to imagine, and what does it appear to foreclose? The different scenarizations offered by both Kathleen and the Maine Economic Growth Council in the *Measures of Growth in Focus* report (figure 1, chapter 1) are clearly problematic in the ways that they reinforce purified divisions and obscure important practices and interrelationships. What other scenarizations can be offered to the process of regional livelihood composition? Who gets to participate in performing the whole? Who appears in public as the expert capable of making such a scenarization?

Commoning at the coordinate of scenarization is not a matter of someone (like me) developing an image and then propagating it to all. It requires, rather, the mobilization of processes by which scenarizations themselves become sites of contestation and collective theorization. It requires “participatory theory” (Pain and Kindon 2007) through practices by which aspiring “scene-makers” enter into relations of accountability and mutual vulnerability with communities of practice.<sup>112</sup> Imagine representations of Maine's “whole” emerging from bottom-up processes of knowledge-making in which multiple constituencies would negotiate complex values, measurements (and non-measurements), and visions to compose provisional

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112 It should be clear here how all of the coordinates discussed thus far are intimately related, since this question of a “community of practice” is the question of constituency, and any representation of a “whole” will confront the questions of value(s) and measurement/comparison.

scenarizations to enable strategic collective action. What would this look like? What might it generate?

### 5. *Knowledge and Uncertainty*

What can we claim as knowledge and where does this knowledge reach its limits? How are various forms of knowledge established, rendered valid, compelling, or obligatory in ecopoietic struggles? How are forms of knowledge constituted as durable commons upon which other negotiations may then be “founded”? How is the constitutive uncertainty at the heart of all knowing acknowledged or suppressed? How might it be used or abused in order to challenge a well-established causal linkage or knowledge claim? How are the tensions between knowledge and uncertainty negotiated? Who is able to participate and who is excluded? These are all key questions of a coordinate which rarely appears as such. Knowledge is often posed as that which dispels uncertainty and intervenes to settle negotiations: “The economic and social science arena, I don't know,” said Dana, the environmental coalition director, “But geology, biology, chemistry, physics ... There are actually things that are constant, that there's a *law*. [laughs] The *scientific laws*! They've been proven, and so I have less tolerance for people who sort of argued that ... those facts [can be disputed]” (interview 25). It is clear, however, that these “laws” do not always settled disputes in the ways that Dana would hope. Scientific facts are called into question, contradicted with other facts, replaced by new facts upon further investigation, unsettled as legitimate modes of knowing (as in some Christian fundamentalist contestations), or simply ignored

altogether by those who refuse to settle the matter at hand.

Much of what passes for disputes between economy, society, and environment can be articulated instead as conflicts over different knowledge claims, ways of knowing, and relations to uncertainty. It is a claim to a causal link between “productivity,” business success, economic growth, and the well-being of Maine people that enables the Maine Development Foundation and others (Chad, interview 8) to suggest that policy oriented around increasing worker output should become a priority to achieve “quality of life for all Maine people” (Maine Development Foundation 2013).<sup>113</sup> It is the often-assumed causal link between income levels and various health, education, and life satisfaction outcomes that renders social work into a project of economic assimilation. And it is the appeal to an incontestable, objective zone of Nature, and the scientific facts that describe its laws, that enable environmentalists to claim immunity to political contestations of knowledge. Yet for all of the work to “short-circuit” political negotiation via appeals to “facts” (Latour 2004), politics remains active at the very heart of debate because it is the nature of this knowledge itself that is open(ed) for negotiation.

It was clear when I spoke with Dana that there is a significant difference between the *assertion* of indisputable fact and its actual role (or lack thereof) in an ecopoietic negotiation process. In contrast to the causal chain that might be asserted by an economic developer to claim that giving tax breaks to a large corporation will ultimately lead to greater community well-being, Dana asserted that many causal chains in her own work are much simpler and clearer: “Pollution in water makes you sick. Pollution in air makes you sick. Right? ... It has a very clear, direct arrow

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<sup>113</sup> Such “productivity” in Marxian terms is related closely to the rate of *exploitation* (Wolff and Resnick 1987, 169)

from here to here” (interview 25). Dana's sound bite may make for an effective organizational pamphlet phrase, but it elides the multiple complex mediations that are actually needed to establish such a link between pollution and sickness. I asked her about a different issue in which causation might be more difficult to simplify: “It strikes me that the climate change argument is just as long a chain of causation as the corporate profit argument,” I proposed. Her response was telling:

It shouldn't be! You know? It shouldn't be because it's so clearly... because it's science! *Science*, right? You pump too much carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere, it traps heat, which is then ... warms up the ocean, warms up global temperatures, causes the ice to melt. You know, creates more moisture in the air, creates more extreme weather .... (interview 25, vocal emphasis in original)

It “*shouldn't* be,” since “science” ostensibly simplifies all complex claims into indisputable facts that are subsequently reducible to sound bites; but Dana's attempt to clearly distill these relations in this manner *fails* in an unfinished proliferation of elements and linkages, each of which is just as complex as the next. Can an environmentalist trump all other political claims with appeals to objective science? Can an economist do the same? My own answer is a strong “it depends...,” but it is not my task here to pursue the question further. Rather I am noting that this question itself must become a key site of ethical contestation, a key coordinate of negotiation.

Rather than obscuring politics and ethics in the name of factual closure, or excluding certain beings and relations in the name of questioning science (think climate change denial), knowledge and uncertainty must itself be posed as a site of commoning, of struggles to open the stakes, the processes, and the consequences of knowledge production and its limits to collective process. This is not at all to propose that “facts” cannot be provisionally settled, or that common “foundations”

of knowledge should not be sought among particular collectives in order to work out the possible shapes of being-in-common. Rather, it is to follow Latour—and I allude here to his crucial and substantive work on the questions posed by this coordinate (Latour 1987; 1999; 2004; 2005)—in proposing that, “The deliberations of the collective must no longer be suspended or short-circuited by some definitive knowledge ...The collective does not claim to know, but it has to experiment in such a way that it can learn in the course of the trial” (2004, 196).

### 6. Needs and Strategies

One can hardly talk of livelihoods without confronting the question of needs. “It boils down to *survival* at the end of the day,” said Dennis, the renewable energy business owner (interview 27). “We’re obliged to play [the game of market competition],” said Arnold, a regional development agency director, “not because the game’s being played, but because you need to *survive*. (interview 10, vocal emphasis in original, insert added). “What are the needs?” asked Harriet, describing her bottom-up approach to rural economic development (interview 14). There is a widespread sense that when one peels back hegemonic discourses about jobs, income, productivity, and market competition, a kind of *essence* is revealed: that which is *necessary*, “basic needs” upon which all else depends and which ultimately drive the dynamics of livelihood. As Chad, the economic development agency director, described: “Regardless of what you’re doing or regardless how you value wealth or whatever, there is a bare minimum in there that would define some basic needs. Resources to ... money enough for food, fuel, health and other things (interview 8). This, then, clearly constitutes a key coordinate: What do we *need*?



The question is not as simple as it may initially appear, for “need” is a tricky concept. It performatively names precisely that which it asserts: a necessity, an incontestability, those conditions which must be met in order to avoid suffering, undoing, or even death. To assert a need is, quite often, to make a demand: fulfill *this or else*. Thus the discourse of needs can appear with a great force of uncommoning: “Have you drove through Princeton and Dartmouth [Maine]?” asked Owen, “I have. It's freakin' abject poverty there. Those people need *jobs*. I mean, it's not even a question” (interview 1, vocal emphasis in original). And yet at the same time that needs are mobilized to stop conversation or contestation—closing off the possibility, for example, that “jobs” are not the only meaningful response to “poverty”—they are also key means of *challenging* hegemony. “We don't *need* more *stuff*!” said Bradley, conservation consortium director, challenging the supposed necessity of growth and the ongoing increase of commodity production and consumption (interview 17, vocal emphasis in original). To ask “What are the needs?” (Harriet, interview 14) in a community development process is to raise the possibility that hegemonic economy is not, in fact, meeting them or even engaging them. It is also, potentially, to draw on the seeming-incontestability and even “naturalness” of needs in order to gain an ontopolitical foothold in the face of a powerful assemblage.

Here, then, is a core challenge at the heart of this crucial coordinate of needs: we seem to *need* to speak of needs, and yet to do so risks participating in a naturalization or uncommoning by which particular relations are rendered seemingly-inevitable or incontestable. Negotiation cannot simply unfold, then, around questions of “how to meet needs,” and nor can it simply be founded on lists of “basic needs” (e.g., Max-Neef 1991; Noonan 2006; Rauschmayer, Omann, and

Frühmann 2011; Seguino 1995) that would enable normative interventions or judgments upon existing relations of livelihood provision. It must involve the very questions of what “needs” *are*, who gets to decide, on what basis they may be claimed, and who is constituted as their subject. What is going on when we assert that there is a *needer* who *needs*? Are there ways to think about this that might enable more robust commonings around struggles for sustenance? I will suggest three key areas in need of clarifying formulation: the distinction between “needs” and “strategies,” the definition of “need” itself, and the question of the subject of this need.

If needs tend to confront us as incontestable assertions, then an important distinction between “needs” and “strategies” might help to loosen the grip of this uncommoning. This is a distinction found in the theory and practice of nonviolent communication (Rosenberg 2003) as well as in the work of radical development theorist Manfred Max-Neef (1991; 1992).<sup>114</sup> It is also enacted in the complex mediation work enacted and described by my interviewee Irene, who sought to break the “golden orbs of value” in chapter 7. In each of her examples of creative negotiation, the key move involved a recognition that the things appearing as immediate needs—building a road, developing a particular site, enacting a law, or even creating jobs—are, in fact, *strategies* intended to meet needs that are much less specific. “You have to go down,” she suggested. “What's underneath the need, the *stated* need?” (interview 16, vocal emphasis in original). People need to be nourished, and getting a job to earn money to buy food is a strategy to achieve this nourishment. A town manager needs to serve the diverse demands of their community, and promoting a particular development proposal is a strategy to

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114 For Max-Neef, the distinction is phrased in terms of “needs” and “satisfiers.”

accomplish this. By opening up a “deeper” conversation about needs, and loosening the grip of that which appears—at first—as a “need,” Irene enables a radically different negotiation to unfold. If people in Princeton and Dartmouth, Maine (Owen's example, cited above) have needs for sustenance, health, and belonging, then “jobs” might appear as only one possible strategy to realized them. Another strategy might involve challenges to the very assemblages that have rendered jobs obligatory. Additionally, what kinds of new dynamics might be generated if the needs/strategies distinction were foregrounded in the struggle over Plum Creek's rezoning and the future of Moosehead Lake? Plum Creek's plan was a strategy to fulfill its need to maximize shareholder returns. Do local people need this strategy to meet needs of sustenance? Are there other strategies that might be mobilized? The uncommoning grip of “need” on collective imagination might be loosened here to make way for new forms of creative negotiation.

What, then, is a “need”? In one common form, needs appear to be *that which is necessary given a refusal to question the hegemonic assemblage itself*. This is what allowed Owen to assert the “need” for jobs as unquestionable: given isolated individuals captured by a coercive assemblage in which access to key means of sustenance have been privatized and monetized, then “jobs” will indeed appear as that which is utterly necessary. The other side of the same assemblage is the widespread assertion of business “needs”: an improved “business climate,” a friendly “regulatory environment,” favorable taxation policies, and “incentives” that allocate public funds to private ends. Yet even alternative formulations that would contest these articulations tend to mimic a naturalization of need. Rather than assume a hegemonic etho-ecology, various “basic needs” or “human needs” approaches in development theory assert an essence that lies beneath all variable assemblages.

“Fundamental human needs,” writes Manfred Max-Neef, “are the same in all cultures and in all historical periods” (1992, 199–200). In Rauschmayer, Omann, and Frühmann's terms, needs are “the most fundamental dimension of human flourishing” (2011b, 10). The danger here is that counter-hegemonic discourses might end up actualizing the very same diagram of power as that which they purport to challenge: mobilizing a discourse of necessity and essence in the name of closing off ethico-political contestation and rendering the always-situated politics of knowledge production invisible.

Does the distinction between needs and strategies require a positing of need as foundational essence? I do not think so. An alternative is already present in the work of Max-Neef (1991; 1992), though submerged and undeveloped. Max-Neef commonly presents needs as objective forces or properties that subsist beneath the cultural variations of human life. The Nature/Culture distinction remains central. In other moments, however, he recognizes something more complex: *needs do not precede the strategies that fulfill them*. Because needs are inseparable from the ways in which they are addressed in concrete, historical experience, “it is inappropriate,” writes Max-Neef, “to speak of their being 'satisfied' or 'fulfilled.' ... It may be better to speak of realizing, experiencing or actualizing needs through time and space” (1991, 24). He thus oscillates: on one hand, needs are human essences; on the other, they do not pre-exist their “actualization” via satisfiers. I want to push this tension into another space altogether: needs, I propose, are not essences, properties, or even spaces of actual or potential lack within a living being or assemblage. They are, rather, *retroactively-stabilized propositions* that enable us to loosen the grip of particular strategies. “Needs” are themselves discursive *strategies* for actualizing the virtual differently. If I “need” nutrition, for example, it is only because particular

relations of my bodily assemblage to particular foods and nutrients have been articulated into the abstraction of “nutrition” *so that I might explore the possibility that my constitutive relations might be assembled differently* without threatening “my” existence. A politics of needs must always foreground the sense in which one can never find a need except in abstraction: it is always *this* relation and *that* relation. Life is strategies “all the way down,” and “need,” in fact, constitutes yet another strategy to add to (and transform) the rest.

Finally, we come to the question of *who* or *what* is the subject of need (and strategy). In the hegemonic articulation, this is often answered in terms of an ecologically-isolated human individual or family. This is what makes it possible for Eric the regional economist to repeat a classic assertion of economy over environment: “The environment as a subject gets far more attention from wealthy places than poor places, and it gets far more attention in good times than bad times. ... It's related to the stresses on the hierarchy of needs” (interview 1). When a human can be presented as an isolated individual, with needs reduced to immediate bodily inputs that are ranked in hierarchical order (i.e., Maslow 1943), then all other constitutive relations can be relegated to the “social” and “environmental” as luxuries. Marxian economics partakes of a similar structure of thought when it views “necessary labor” as “the time-measured expenditure of human brain and muscle required to reproduce the performers of surplus labor” (Resnick and Wolff 2006, 93). Not only does this fall into the trap of focusing only on the “making a living” dimension of the triad discussed earlier, it also risks reducing necessity to the level of the individual wage-earner and (perhaps) their immediate family.<sup>115</sup>

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115 For a further elaboration of this argument, see Miller (2013).

In all of these cases, articulations of need are intimately linked to questions of identity, community, and ecology. If “to be one is always to *become with many*” (Haraway 2008, 4), then who is to say where the boundaries of the subject of a given articulation of “need” should be drawn? Indeed, it must be recognized that the assertion of needs and the composition of “self” and collectivity are intricately intertwined, actualized together in the ongoing encounter between making, being-made, and making others. To common at the coordinate of needs must also involve explicit negotiation of the very question of community and its boundaries.

### 7. *Health and Well-Being*

Closely related to the coordinate of needs, and overlapping with that of value(s), is the question of health and well-being. This might also be referred to in more general terms as the normative evaluation of sustenance. Does a particular livelihood assemblage generate favorable and desirable outcomes for the beings that emerge from it? In Deleuzian/Spinozan terms, does a particular configuration sustain affects of “joy,” that is, connections that enhance a body's capacities to act, to create, to respond, and to become anew (Deleuze 1988, 72)? Struggles over competing visions for regional development are often, in part, conflicts over definitions and experiences of health, well-being, and (as described earlier) “quality of life.” It is crucial, therefore, to make the move of de-linking these normative terms from their hegemonic associations with measures such as income, employment, and economic growth. Dorothy, the community health worker (interview 30), knew this: hence her seeming conflation between a “healthy economy” and a “healthy community”

described in chapter 6. This was also a move that I heard—surprisingly, and only after substantial conversation—in some of my interviews with economic developers.

When I asked Trevor, director of a regional planning agency, for example, about his understanding of “the economy,” his initial reply was quite conventional:

The simplest definition of the economy, or, you know, of economic development is essentially the creation of wealth. ... There's pretty much a consensus that, you know, that's what you're about—whether its tax base, or jobs, or product sale, whether its a service—you're creating a flow of dollars or capital to then reap rewards for other individuals to then have a salary to then do something. (interview 11)

Further questioning, however, opened up new terrain:

*EM:* So when we talk about economy as involving wealth, economic development the creation of wealth, there are obviously different definitions of wealth. Is economy just monetary wealth?

*Trevor:* No. ... It's enjoyment, it's satisfaction. OK? So what constitutes that? You might be very happy living in a log cabin burning wood. The next person may not. You can go from subsistence to being able to educate your kids. What's your motivation? .... (Interview 11)

The entire edifice of connections between quantitative measures such as GDP—which Trevor relies on heavily in a number of projects—and qualitative well-being was shaken. If, in fact, “the next person” may aspire to a radically different notion of the good life, then what must development become? An *event* of encounter between differing articulations of health and well-being. What *is* health? What *is* well-being? What *is* quality of life? Who gets to decide and by what process? To what extent do current assemblages serve these ends as they are currently articulated? To what extent are their current articulations produced, in part, by current assemblages? What might our notions of health and well-being become if composed within different etho-ecologies?

## 8. *Limits and Sufficiency*

From questions of need and of well-being, we are able to move to the coordinate of limits and sufficiency. What is enough? To what extent are limits imposed from a beyond over which we have no control and to which our desires must be subordinated? To what extent can and should limits be challenged and, in some cases perhaps, overcome? To what extent do our ethico-political and ecological commitments demand that we set our own limits and say “*enough is enough*”? This coordinate is folded into that of needs and strategies as well as that of knowledge and uncertainty, for to ask about limits one must know something about needs, and to know something one must confront the edges of unknowing. But it is also a distinct site of negotiation, for it engages us in questions about how we act in the presence of forces that challenge all limits and those that push back at these challenges.

The terrain of negotiation around limits in Maine is complex. One discourse asserts that because human beings have unlimited desires and are “competing for a finite pool of resources” (Marvin, economic policy nonprofit director, interview 7), we must construct efficient forms of allocation. Market mechanisms, in particular, have the capability of generating perpetually-growing prosperity even in the face of scarcity. Moreover, limited resources constrain our investments and demand that we always choose our allocations based on a particular notion of efficiency: “If you have limited resources, you want to put your money, as a lender, as an economic developer, where you’re going to get the biggest return on your investment,” said Oscar the regional planning office director (interview 13). The majority of public development money, the argument implied, should therefore go toward “the profit



maximizers” (Oscar, interview 13) rather than, for example, local farms or community-building efforts. The seeming paradox here is that the assertion of limited resources leads to a dynamic of unlimited growth: Maine people “need to do things smarter, different, faster ... we need to innovate in terms of products and services in order to grow the economy” (interview 13).

And yet, say opponents of this view, “Whether you're a fungus in the soil or you're a human being, you're going to alter the environment in order to survive. ... but *there's limits to that on a finite planet*” (David, environmental activist, interview 24, emphasis added). “Growth, by definition,” said Elizabeth the environmental policy advocate, “isn't sustainable on a finite planet, you know?” (interview 21). Everyone thus appears to agree that human beings face profound limits; the question is what these limits are, who is able to know them, and what their existence does or does not imply. In all cases, too, assertions of limits continually risk uncommonings: like many articulations of needs, they pose seemingly-incontrovertible demands that (seek to) become foundational terrains rather than constitute open questions alongside others.

But is everyone so certain? Might we find unsettling articulations at the heart of uncommoning assertions of limits that would open them up to new questions and becomings? Take David, for example, who was at first certain of limits enough to say that “we [humans] are a cancer growth” on a finite planet (interview 24). Yet his ecological inclinations also pushed him towards a kind of *unlimited* view:

12,000 years ago there was a glacier here! You don't think that's going to come back? This farm's not going to be here in 12,000 years! OK? And so the, the change is inevitable, massive change is inevitable,

*climate* change is inevitable. So in the bigger picture of looking at the world, we humans think we're so important and we think that we can really make a difference? I don't know if we can. (interview 24)

In the context of “deep time” (McPhee 1981), what do limits really mean? What does the exhaustion of coal signify as all existing life itself becomes a layer of fossil carbon in a billion-year process of geomorphic change? David reached a limit here, at the threshold of infinity: “I don't know if I have an answer. I don't know where you place the limits. It's fairly clear that on a systems level, things are collapsing. Even here on this farm. ... [but] when we're gone all these species might come back. ... I don't know how you draw the limits (interview 24). I do not describe David's uncertainty here to undermine pressing tasks of taking responsibility for the ecologies in which we participate. Neither does David himself, as a dedicated activist, take this path. But I propose that there is a crucial ethical moment in this recognition of a non-limit: it exposes the limits of human mastery, and a limit to knowing even what the very question of “limits” might entail.

On the other side of the “limits to growth” divide in Maine, it is also the case that advocates of unlimited growth reach limits that may open to new exposures. When I asked Arnold, director of a Maine regional economic development council, how he thought about the long-term consequences of an ongoing economic growth and development trajectory, he had nothing to say. “I would make the case that we have a tremendous amount of under-utilized facilities for growth,” he proposed, hesitating, but could only respond further to my query with a long “hmmmm” and an ensuing silence (interview 10). But my conversation with Oscar the regional planning director was different. Despite his strong advocacy for the effectivity of

investing in the “profit maximizers,” Oscar took my challenges about growth quite seriously:

I would agree that I am uncertain, uncomfortable about the notion [of unlimited growth]... Are we able to put into place appropriate strategies, smart growth strategies and that sort of thing, so we can accommodate that growth without diminishing those things that make us want to stay here? I think the answer to that is... we can *do* those things, but we should not expect them to be 100% successful. That there will be some degradation, and it's inevitable, and there's not a *whole* lot we can do about it. (interview 13, vocal emphasis in original)

He was visibly uncomfortable with this proposition and his next statement rang hollow. “We need more jobs, more innovation, to increase the level of economic activity so that we can afford more things that support our vision of our society as we imagine it rather than what it's like” (interview 13). In response, I proposed:

*EM:* That's interesting, because that would mean that maybe someone could actually calculate how much growth would we need to achieve that, and then just maintain that level. I've never seen that number.

*Oscar:* That's an interesting idea.

*EM:* How much growth would we need in Maine in order to afford the life that we want?

*Oscar:* Right. There are a lot of variables. I think that would be an interesting conversation. *What do we need?* ... And then what are the trend lines? If the social cost trend is up because the population is aging ... Yeah, *interesting!* That's an interesting way of thinking about it. A new way of ... like that! I can think now about thinking about it down the road, about how do we adjust these trajectories so that they're more in concert. (interview 13, vocal emphasis in original)

Oscar was clearly challenged in the face of an unlimited growth vision he is not often asked to confront and, if only in a small and momentary way, rose to the challenge of considering a new (and quite radical) approach.

From two different directions, I encountered interviewees asserting an ontology of limits (and unlimits) and then confronting the very limits of their own assertions. Something opens here that might become a true coordinate of ethical negotiation. Far from denying the reality of limits in the name of human mastery, or asserting their absolute grip in the name of human finitude (which is, in fact, another form of mastery in an epistemological form—the claim to *know for sure*), a commoning at the coordinate of limits exposes us to the vulnerabilities and becomings of these questions: What is possible? What is not? What is freedom, and must it always entail an overcoming of limits, or might it also take form in the respect of and creative response to limits? How might these kinds of questions become sites of actual public conversation and contestation?

### 9. *“Incentives” and Ecologies of Practice*

It is quite common in public policy circles to hear talk of “getting the incentives right” (e.g., Weimer 1992; Hitchcock and Willard 2012). Whether in the realm of economic development, social service, or environmental protection, there is a hegemonic sense that the world is composed of rationally optimizing, self-interested individuals who will only comply with policy aspirations if presented with the proper set of “carrots and sticks” (Frohlich and Oppenheimer 1974). The problems with such an articulation should be clear after my critical tracings in chapters 3 and 4, and it might be tempting in this context to reject the very notion of “incentives” altogether. Is this not merely a mode of governmentality seeking to institute forms of rule in which authority has been internalized as the very desire of

subjects themselves (Rose 1999; Foucault 2010)? This may often be the case. But there is a broader and more ecological way to think about incentives that can configure them as a key coordinate of ethical livelihood negotiation.

Take, for example, a moment in my conversation with the environmental business owner, Dennis. I asked him, “At what point are we trying to make a fundamentally problematic system sustainable by greening it, versus figuring out how to change our relationships?” (interview 27). His reply could, at first glance, be read as an instance of the hegemonic notion of incentives: “Yeah, it's a massive question,” he responded, “I don't have the answer to it ... [pause] ... That's where my optimism is challenged. Because I don't always trust the instincts in people to pursue good when the benefits of pursuing bad are so... *attractive* (interview 27, vocal emphasis in original). One might picture here a set of pre-constituted humans, acting out their “human nature” to pursue maximum personal benefit even at the cost of planetary destruction. But this is not the only way to read Dennis' response. What if the “attraction” he speaks of is a matter not of essential individual propensities, but rather the emergent property of a habitat, an *etho-ecology* in Stengers' (2005a; 2005b) terms?

Incentives, following the work of Stengers described in chapter 7, can be understood as the name of particular kinds of obligating attachments within etho-ecologies that render them potent. I understood this during an interview with Bradley, the conservation consortium director. My warning flags went up when he used the word “incentives,” but the more carefully I listened, the more I realized that he meant something quite different from the hegemonic version of the term. “Another theme in my work,” he described, “is moving away from thinking about

individuals and to thinking about what are the incentives that people work and live in” (interview 17). Incentives here are a move away from questions of individual motivation and toward what Stengers (2005) calls an “ecology of practices.” As Bradley described:

So if you're an elected official, the rhetoric about jobs is absolutely important, but the other thing that's important is maintaining your tax revenue so that you don't go bankrupt. So you have somebody come in and say, 'I'd like to replace that mill that just shut down, and I'm going to do it by doing something that's actually really bad for the environment, but it'll cover a lot of taxes,' and you're immediately in a tough spot. And that's not because there's an explicit conflict between nature and economy, it's because the people coming in aren't bringing in alternatives. You know? The challenge there is to figure out the alternatives, and to figure out how you build incentives to the various decision-makers. (interview 17)

It is not a matter of providing carrots and sticks to self-interested individuals, nor of assuming any particular essential motivation at the heart of practice; rather it is about composing *new relations and institutional configurations in which new forms of motivation and action become possible*. “How do you build incentives for them that favor decisions that see the broader range of implications, and don't always take the presented alternative as [inevitable]?” (Bradley, interview 17).

Commoning at the coordinate of incentives is to open the question of what kinds of ecologies of practice might challenge and transform existing options, motivations, and desires, and what might be enacted in their place to offer new possibilities for action. Of *course* the Plum Creek struggle was polarizing: the ecologies of practice which composed it entailed a single proposal to which there was an institutionally-mandated yes-or-no answer: “*that's* what creates these dichotomies,” said Bradley, “is when you're given *a* proposal...and suddenly it's jobs versus the environment” (interview 17, vocal emphasis in original). It is the etho-

ecology which constitutes this situation that must be transformed, made into a site of struggle, negotiation, and creative practice. In Bradley's terms: "One way you evade these dichotomies, is by simply *evading these dichotomies*—you just *do* things" (interview 17, vocal emphasis in original); that is, you just do things that compose a new ecology of practice and thus render a new habitat inhospitable to the dichotomies—or, in the wider frame of this thesis, the *trio*.

### 10. *Place, Time, and Habitat(s)*

We make, we are made, and we make others, but this triad does not float in blank white space as my image (figure 20) might imply. The encounters that constitute livelihoods are always specifically located in space and time. We can thus ask, in what are two distinct coordinates that I will combine here for the sake of brevity: What are the *places* and *times* in which we make our livings? What places and times make us? What places and times do we, in turn, participate in making? How does the ethical negotiation of livelihood connect us to multiple places and times, weaving a web of interrelation and co-implication across the planet and through generations? These coordinates became particularly apparent in two conversations.

Elizabeth, a policy advocate at an environmental nonprofit, suggested that a key distinction between "economic developers" and "environmental advocates" is the temporality on which they focus. "I think it totally depends on your time-frame," she proposed, "If all you're worried about is jobs next year, or profits next year, you can ignore the environment. ... You can dump anything you want in the

rivers, you can dump anything you want in the air, you can cut down all the trees” (interview 21). If one's focus is on the long-term however, the picture radically changes: “If somebody screws up a piece of land, it may not be recoverable, and even if it is recoverable, we may be talking a hundred, a hundred and fifty years. ... Getting people to think in longer-time frames is a challenge” (Elizabeth, interview 21). We are made and unmade by the work of others—human and nonhuman—who came before us.<sup>116</sup> What do we “owe” our predecessors? And what responsibilities will we cultivate with those who come after? There is a reason that so many policy advocates in Maine speak of “heritage” and “legacy”: they recognize a key site of ethical livelihood negotiation.

The question of *place* was raised by Matthew, a private economic consultant, in a conversation about the limits of local and regional environmental protection efforts. Far too many environmentalists, Matthew suggested, end up advocating for the outsourcing of landscape destruction to other places by limiting it at home and refusing to draw connections with current forms of human livelihood provision (see also Berlik, Kittredge, and Foster 2002):

It's “Oh, cutting trees on state land, that's terrible! By definition, you shouldn't do that!” So we'll save the environment by stopping you from cutting those trees, because that's just a terrible thing to do. And then we'll build our 5,000 square foot house with lumber from Canada. You know, one-third of all houses built in this country are built with lumber from Canada. (interview 9)

Matthew's argument was intended primarily to point out what he sees as logical discrepancies and inconsistencies in environmentalists arguments. I read it, however, in a more ethical vein as pointing to what Val Plumwood calls “shadow

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<sup>116</sup> Our use of and dependence on fossil fuel is a particularly powerful example of this temporal “being-made.”



places,” that is, “all those places that produce or are affected by the commodities [we] consume, places consumers don’t know about, don’t want to know about, and in a commodity regime don’t ever need to know about or take responsibility for” (2008, 146–147). The habitats of most humans in Maine (as elsewhere) are not only located in Maine, but are also scattered across the planet in myriad sites we cannot see, and connected to us via complex mediators that can never be fully traced.<sup>117</sup>

Commoning at the coordinate of place and habitat entails the work of taking responsibility for our shadow places—as best we can—and placing these constitutive relations at the public heart of our ethico-political struggles. What does it mean that New England's reforestation—what Bill McKibben has called the “explosion of green” (1995)—over the last century has been underwritten, in part, by the devastation of forests in the Global South? How are we to common at the site of such constitutive relations of simultaneous care and violence? We might consider, perhaps, multiple forms of solidarity enacted with social movements in our shadow places, fighting to care for their own livelihood relations. We might also consider work to re-align place and habitat in ways that enable increased exposure to our constitutive relations. This might, in fact, be a different way to frame the “localization” movements currently proliferating in Maine and elsewhere (e.g., Berry 2002; Hines 2000; James and Cato 2014; M. Shuman 2000; 2007; Ward and Lewis 2002): rather than parochial attempts to create (an impossible) “self-sufficiency” and “de-link” from the rest of the world, might localization be seen as one strategy—along with international solidarity—to re-common our habitat relations?

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117 Indeed, these shadow places are accompanied by shadow *times*—unknowable histories that made us and times to come that we make yet can never encounter.

## Toward Honest Livings

My purpose in this chapter has been to constitute a set of experimental concepts that might help to re-define what in Maine is often spoken of as an “honest living.” If this phrase usually invokes a normative demand to reject government “handouts” and other forms of social redistribution, to find wage work producing commodities and earning money, or perhaps even to start a business in which one can make money from the labor of others (“honestly,” of course), then I seek to radically alter it. By “honesty” I do not mean the revelation of a truth, but rather a mutual exposure to ethical becoming. In Haraway’s terms it is not “some trope-free fantastic kind of natural authenticity,” but is rather “about co-constitutive naturalcultural dancing, holding in esteem ... open to those who look back reciprocally” (2008, 27). Honesty is commoning.

To “make an honest living,” then, would be to stand in the presence of our multiple forms of agency and their limits, and actively moving toward (always limited) acknowledgement and responsibility in the face of our relations of making, being-made, and making-others. It would be to continually seek open vulnerable engagements of the multiple ethical coordinates that traverse our assemblages like folded nets: negotiations at multiple intersections of health and value(s), value(s) and measurement, needs and constituency, limits and questions of knowledge and uncertainty, incentives and etho-ecologies of the “whole,” and the interconnections of places and habitats. The conceptual tools I have sketched in this chapter are, of course, but preliminary explorations of a complex terrain of such challenges and possibilities. How do we navigate impossible complexity in ways that also connect with daily experience, help to clarify messy relations in useful ways, and speak with

languages that can be easily understood and circulated? I have not addressed this crucial question, but I hope to have opened space for its further engagement.



## Conclusion

Rather than reiterate the argument of the thesis in purely conceptual terms, I conclude with an illustration. This is the semi-fictional story of Rick and Theresa, who live in rural northern Maine with their three children.<sup>118</sup> By viewing their lives in terms of both the hegemonic trio and the approach of ecological livelihoods, I hope to offer at least a faint glimpse of what this thesis has intended to do and what new directions it might open for future research and action. As will become clear, of course, this is also a story about me, for my life is not wholly separated from that of Rick and Theresa, and it is my own relation to these ideas, and to the worlds in which they aspire to intervene, that calls forth new demands for new responses. These are calls that I am only beginning to learn to heed.



For nearly 30 years, Rick worked in a sawmill owned by a multinational investment firm. He cut Maine trees into the lumber that fed the housing construction bubble, making what for his part of the world was a decent wage—that is, until the mill's corporate managers decided that it was no longer profitable, shut down the mill, and sold off its equipment. Rick is now unemployed, along with 150 other people in his small rural community. There is no other mill, and no other similar jobs to speak of in the nearby area. His wife, Theresa, works a part-time job

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<sup>118</sup> They are made-up characters, but are based on a number of people and stories I have encountered in my fieldwork and in many years living and working in the state. In some cases, elements are drawn from specific contemporary policy documents and will be cited where appropriate.

as a bookkeeper while also taking primary responsibility for childcare, and her income plus Rick's unemployment benefits and some food stamps are now the only financial sources that support them and their three children.

Rick is angry: no way of sustaining his family, now “on the god-damn dole like one of those lazy parasites who just *take and take* from hard working Americans.” His family has been in this part of Maine for five generations—it's the only place he knows, and it's *home*. Now he might have to leave, but to where? “Illegal immigrants are taking the jobs everywhere,” he says, “and a hard working man can't make an honest living anymore.” Meanwhile, “a bunch of rich yuppie environmentalists” are coming up here and proposing to turn these woods into a National Park. “These are the same people,” thinks Rick, “whose regulations sent my job packing to places with a better business climate, and now they want to lock up the resource for good so they can have their spiritual experiences in the so-called 'wilderness' that my people have been working in, hunting in, and managing for more than a hundred years!”

Maine media outlets have reported that the mill closed due to “market pressures,” and that the company was responding to the “economic reality” of an increasingly competitive “global marketplace.” Rick is a casualty of this inevitable response. Experts are now studying and discussing what (if anything) can be done to ensure an “economic recovery,” to encourage “much needed economic growth” in this “hard-hit” area. Economists and economic developers rally to proclaim that Maine needs less red-tape, new job training programs, a more hospitable “business climate,” and a revolution of “innovation” that will create new products for people like Rick to manufacture.

Meanwhile, a host of “social” workers are mobilizing to help Rick “get back on his feet,” to help him cultivate “social capital” and ensure that he becomes an “asset” to the region. He and Theresa get letters in the mail almost weekly from the cruelly-named Maine Office of Family Independence telling them what they must do in order to keep getting benefits. Theresa despairs about their situation, fearing the worst and feeling little but spiteful judgment from the institutional landscape that now overtly sustains her family. The message is loud-and-clear, and it only reinforces resentment and despair: When you cease to have a job, when you are no longer able to be part of “the economy,” you become a parasite, a liability to your “society,” someone who needs help. And this “help” comes primarily in the form of pushing you to become—as one Maine Community Action Program mission statement puts it—“self-sufficient.”<sup>119</sup> What this means in practice is: “no longer dependent on a handout,” “employable,” “competitive,” “appropriately skilled,” and “adaptable” for the “dynamic” (i.e., perpetually volatile) economy of the future.

Rick and Theresa's whole community and region have effectively become target zones for economic developers and social workers, all concerned to adjust, adapt, and discipline the population into conformity with the economic necessities of the times. This is not an ill-intentioned conspiracy; it is, for those earnestly involved, a necessary response to crisis.

The shifting fortune of Maine workers, however, is not the only crisis unfolding in this region. “Environmentalists” are also raising urgent concerns: these abundant trees are the “lungs of the world” and are needed for carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change (Carter n.d.); this landscape is filled with endangered and

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<sup>119</sup> Community Action Programs (CAPs) are private, nonprofit organizations that commonly administer significant volumes of social assistance resources in rural U.S. communities.

threatened species who need our help (Sierra Club Maine Chapter 2014); humans need “wild places” to be sane and healthy, and we're losing them everywhere (P. Austin, Bennett, and Kimber 2003). In short, there is something called “the environment” that needs saving, and Rick and Theresa live in this environment but are not part of it. Perhaps they are its enemies; unless, of course, (the message from environmentalists goes) they support the National Park and accept that ecotourist jobs can transform the seeming “trade-offs” between economy and environment into a “win-win” situation of renewed (presumably capitalist, and likely low-paid) wage work (Kellett and St. Pierre 1996; T. M. Power 2001; Headwaters Economics 2013).

Rick and Theresa are caught in the grip of the hegemonic trio, the pervasive and powerful articulation of thought and institution that stabilizes and renders seemingly-inevitable a whole host of ethical and political relations. They appear, in fact, to be at the mercy of all three categories, tossed and torn between economy, society, environment, and their professional advocates—dependent upon the whole trio, yet granted very little agency in conventional accounts within any of them. As embodiments of the problematic “social,” and with clear pressure from the rest of “society,” it would seem that they simply must choose between “economy” and “environment.” When the children are at risk of going hungry, and “the economy” has captured so many of the means of livelihood via an enforced dependence on monetary exchange and employment, the choice is not difficult to make.

But what else is going on in this story? Viewing Rick and Theresa's lives through the kaleidoscope of the livelihoods triad, a different picture begins to emerge. In the dimension of *making* a living, it turns out that the couple's jobs are far from the only source of active sustenance. They grow gardens, hunt for deer and



moose, fix their own house and vehicles, cut firewood for heating, share cleaning and cooking work, barter with friends and neighbors for multiple goods and services, and care for their community and the land they live on and near in multiple ways.

In the dimension of having a living *made for them* by others, Rick and Theresa rely on oxygen produced by the forests, soil bacteria in the garden, a relatively stable climate system, and migrant laborers who grow and harvest their purchased food. They rely on Theresa's mother for help with the kids, on friends and neighbors for all kinds of things, on other taxpayers to support them via social programs when times get hard, on deer and moose and their habitats, and on people in nearby and distant places whose land is mined, polluted, or stolen in order to make the phones, cars, microwaves, and televisions that they have come to want or “need.”

At the same time, as *makers of others*, Rick and Theresa are hosts to millions of nonhuman bacteria, they sustain their children in myriad ways, they care for Rick's elderly parents, they go to bean suppers to support local families in need. Rick, in his old job, supported the vacations, second homes, and private school educations of the mill owners, and he provided lumber for homes and businesses all over the region. Rick participates in the Maine Sportsman's Alliance which advocates for (among other things) the protection of deer and fish habitats. One could go on with examples in each of these dimensions.

There is no economy, society, or environment here, except and to the extent that media, researchers, policy-makers, and other professionals mobilize forms of measurement and enforce modes of institution that render Rick and Theresa's complex relations intelligible in these terms. If we engage, instead, in terms of

*ecological livelihoods*, we confront complex ethical-material negotiations among multiple beings. There are no “laws” of the market, no essential or inevitable categories into which everything fits, no pre-determined outcomes. Rick and Theresa are no longer marginal to the action; or, at least, they are not marginal in the same way—no more or less marginal than any other tiny humans in a web of constitutive interrelations. At the same time, Rick and Theresa are not simply pre-given individuals standing amidst a field of conflicting domains, but rather emerge as such from a complex assemblage. Rick's resentment and Theresa's despair have a *habitat*, and it is this habitat that a politics of livelihood must aim to transform—thus making other affects, openings, and alliances possible.

The transformation of such habitat is no small task, and I have barely scratched the surface in this thesis of what it would entail. It is all-too-easy, for example, for me to write about ethical exposure, vulnerability, and becoming present to the open (and terrifying) questions of *ecology*. I live in relative safety, in a well-made house, on fertile and secure land, in a strong community of skilled and loving people, and with access to a vast network of livelihood relations that extend far beyond the place I call “home.” In some sense, I am insulated from having to even confront the very questions I have raised in this thesis; I am not currently forced by relations beyond my control to become *vulnerable* except in ways that do not threaten my zones of comfort.

Rick and Theresa, on the other hand, have no such luxury: theirs is an assemblage in immediate and palpable crisis. What does it mean to ask them to step into a space of even more vulnerability, to become further exposed to the ecologies which make (or unmake) them? Should it be surprising if they were to retreat into the seeming-certainties of fundamentalist Christianity, or to vote for a governor

who is dedicated to spreading the politics of resentment and dismantling social redistribution systems in the name of “opportunity”?<sup>120</sup> Perhaps more importantly for the ethico-political task that confronts us, what kinds of etho-ecologies might compose enough safety and support to enable Rick, Theresa, and others to step into spaces of radical experimentation and becoming-otherwise without fear of losing the precious bit of stability they might yet hold? Nothing I have written in this thesis will be truly relevant without the active engagement of this question.

But supposing this engagement, what might a politics of ecological livelihood entail in Rick and Theresa's lives and larger context? First, the obligation toward employment in a capitalist firm might be opened for contestation when livelihood is seen as a matter of diverse practices, any of which might be further expanded through direct action, policy changes, or other means. “The economy,” along with the accompanying disciplines of the “social,” is only one mode of capture by which certain livelihood relations are enforced and others marginalized or eclipsed. The political question becomes one of *which* forms of livelihood-making we wish to cultivate, and what work is needed to make these more possible and viable for Maine people. Rick and Theresa, no longer just potential employees, are some of the key people who must participate in answering this question.

Secondly, the nature of “social welfare” might change when ecological interdependence becomes a condition of all livelihood rather than a moment of failure. Perhaps some of Rick's resentment towards other so-called “parasites” might change, too, if we are all, in fact, in such a position by virtue of being alive.

What kinds of ethical-political possibilities might be opened if those concerned

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120 Having just re-elected a far-Right “Tea Party” Governor (Paul LePage) many Mainers appear resigned to affirming a culture of climate change denial (whether explicit or implied by inaction), anti-immigrant resentment, public austerity, elite accumulation, “individual responsibility” for collectively-produced problems, and free-market “solutions” to all social challenges.

about Rick and his community were to begin with the assumption of ecological interdependence rather than with a normative demand for an (always-false) individual autonomy? What might Maine's policy professionals become if such an approach was actively explored and enacted? What might *Rick and Theresa* become if enrolled into assemblages that took such interdependence seriously and cultivated its acknowledgement?

Finally, if there is no longer an “environment” outside of the specific enactments of “environmentalists,” what might conflicts over the shape of Maine's landscapes, ecosystems, and multi-species communities become? What kinds of skills, practices of listening, and forms of care would those seeking to enact solidarity with other species need to cultivate if they were no longer cut off from conversation with Rick and Theresa by an economy/environment divide? What would happen if “environmentalists” were to meet Rick and Theresa, in fact, on a terrain of shared vulnerability, recognizing that all are caught—in sometimes very different ways—in modes of livelihood that undermine possibilities for others to flourish?

The work of this thesis, particularly in its engagement with Maine policy and advocacy professionals, has suggested that a fertile space exists—even in the heart of where one might think hegemony to be particularly strong—in which to challenge the hegemonic trio and its associated diagram of power, to open up space for the proliferation of acknowledged complexities and hegemonic instabilities, and to experiment with new ways of articulating and commoning ethico-political struggles and aspirations. This document, as I have already suggested, is only a preliminary sketch-pad for concepts and discourses which must be brought to life through concrete, experimental engagement with on-the-ground efforts to compose

new modes of collective life in Maine and beyond. My challenge in moving forward from here is to imagine and enact forms of action research, sharing, and organizing that can send these ideas “out” into the world to be mobilized, tested, undone, and remade.

What might this look like? I envision my next steps in three parts. First, I am committed to sharing some of the key insights of this thesis with those I have interviewed and with a wider field of policy workers and activists in Maine. I intend to experiment with both writing and public presentation that distills this work into accessible yet substantive forms. Second, I envision two subsequent “rounds” of research: one in which I share elements of this thesis (particularly the decompositional and recompositional elements) back with selected interviewees—perhaps in some form of group workshop—to initiate another round of conversation and learning; another in which I engage a wide variety of “alternative” movements in Maine (local food systems work, cooperative organizing, land conservation, immigrant justice, etc.) to explore ways in which an ecological livelihoods approach might both inform and be transformed by current efforts to construct more ethical modes of life. Finally, I aspire to begin envisioning and constructing some form of institutional infrastructure through which to pursue and sustain experimentation with a politics of ecological livelihood. Might it be possible to constitute new organizations, networks, and campaigns that consciously scramble the distinctions between the three hegemonic categories, disrupt habitual patterns of conversation and debate, and open up spaces for the articulation of other pathways for constructing ethical lives-in-common in Maine and beyond? This is the possibility with which I intend to experiment.



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## Appendix A

### Interview Participant Summary

The following is a summary of the forty interviews conducted for this project between November 2012 and December 2013. The numbers of each interview correspond with the numbers cited in the dissertation text. When two names are designated by one number, this is because two people (in every case from the same organization) were interviewed at the same time.

“Economy” (14 interviews, 15 people)

| # | Pseudonym | Type of Institution | Institutional Role                              | Interview Date   |
|---|-----------|---------------------|---|------------------|
| 1 | Eric      | Academic            | Regional economic analyst                       | 27 November 2012 |
| 2 | Owen      | Nonprofit           | Director of statewide development initiative    | 8 November 2012  |
| 3 | Sandra    | Government          | Director, regional economic development council | 14 November 2012 |
| 4 | Calvin    | Nonprofit           | Director of economic development think tank     | 6 December 2012  |
| 5 | Kathleen  | Government          | Statistician for state government               | 16 November 2012 |

|    |          |            |   |                  |
|----|----------|------------|---|------------------|
| 6  | Harold   | Private    | Economic development consultant                 | 20 November 2012 |
| 7  | Marvin   | Nonprofit  | Director of economic policy think thank         | 11 March 2013    |
| 8  | Chad     | Nonprofit  | Director of economic development organization   | 10 April 2012    |
| 9  | Matthew  | Private    | Economic development consultant and researcher  | 20 March 2013    |
| 10 | Arnold   | Government | Director, regional economic development council | 21 March 2013    |
| 10 | Lorraine | Government | Regional planner                                | 29 November 2012 |
| 11 | Trevor   | Government | Director of regional planning agency            | 29 November 2012 |
| 12 | Ben      | Academic   | Researcher focused on sustainable development   | 14 March 2013    |
| 13 | Oscar    | Government | Director of regional planning agency            | 1 April 2013     |
| 14 | Harriet  | Nonprofit  | Director of statewide rural CD organization     | 15 November 2012 |

“Environment” (14 interviews, 15 people)

| #  | Pseudonym | Type of Institution | Institutional Role                                     | Interview Date  |
|----|-----------|---------------------|--|-----------------|
| 15 | Greg      | Academic            | Director of environmental research program             | 28 May 2013     |
| 16 | Irene     | Nonprofit           | Staff, environmental advocacy organization             | 9 May 2013      |
| 17 | Bradley   | Nonprofit           | Director of regional conservation collaborative        | 24 June 2013    |
| 18 | Carl      | Government          | Staff of state conservation department                 | 13 May 2013     |
| 19 | Stephen   | Nonprofit           | Director of environmental advocacy organization        | 8 May 2013      |
| 19 | Spencer   | Nonprofit           | Staff of environmental advocacy organization           | 8 May 2013      |
| 20 | Walter    | Nonprofit           | Researcher, environmental research nonprofit           | 30 May 2013     |
| 21 | Elizabeth | Nonprofit           | Program director, statewide environmental organization | 8 October 2013  |
| 22 | Nora      | Nonprofit           | Researcher, regional environmental nonprofit           | 10 October 2013 |

|    |        |            |   |                  |
|----|--------|------------|---|------------------|
| 23 | Sean   | Foundation | Director, statewide conservation foundation             | 23 October 2013  |
| 24 | David  | Nonprofit  | Activist, public figure                                 | 11 October 2013  |
| 25 | Dana   | Nonprofit  | Director, statewide environmental advocacy organization | 17 October 2013  |
| 26 | Paula  | Nonprofit  | Director, statewide environmental advocacy organization | 25 March 2013    |
| 27 | Dennis | Business   | Owner of green energy company                           | 10 December 2013 |
| 28 | Travis | Nonprofit  | Environmental health organization                       | 12 December 2013 |

“Society” / “Community” (12 interviews, 12 people)

| #  | Pseudonym | Type of Institution | Institutional Role                                     | Interview Date   |
|----|-----------|---------------------|--|------------------|
| 29 | Richard   | Nonprofit           | CEO, social service organization                       | 13 November 2013 |
| 30 | Dorothy   | Nonprofit           | Director, regional community health project            | 26 November 2013 |
| 31 | Brenda    | Nonprofit           | Researcher, social advocacy organization               | 4 November 2013  |
| 32 | Grace     | Nonprofit           | Director, statewide community health program           | 19 November 2013 |
| 33 | Mark      | Nonprofit           | Director, regional community health project            | 12 November 2013 |
| 34 | Fred      | Nonprofit           | Director, statewide community loan fund                | 18 November 2013 |
| 35 | Paul      | Nonprofit           | Social worker, community action program                | 25 November 2013 |
| 36 | Brent     | Nonprofit           | Community development finance specialist               | 2 December 2013  |
| 37 | Helen     | Government          | Head of sub-department of government agency            | 21 November 2013 |
| 38 | Frank     | Nonprofit           | Departmental director, regional charity                | 5 December 2013  |
| 39 | Jane      | Nonprofit           | Director of major philanthropic community organization | 25 November 2013 |
| 40 | Carol     | Government          | Director of state volunteer office                     | 11 December 2013 |

**Total Interviews: 40 (42 people)**





**Appendix B**  
**Human Ethics Materials**

**Information Sheet**  
**Consent Form**

Research Project:  
**Rethinking Economy and Ecology  
for Regional Development in Maine**

Information Sheet

Who is carrying out the research? Ethan Miller, a PhD student in Political and Social Thought at University of Western Sydney (School of Humanities and Communication Arts), Australia. I am a U.S. citizen and a resident of Maine for the past 15 years, recently abroad in Australia to study with the Community Economies Research Initiative. I have returned home to Maine for his dissertation research. My research supervisors are Dr. Katherine Gibson and Dr. Gerda Roelvink.

What is this research project about? I am conducting research on ways in which different understandings of “economy” and “ecology” affect public dialogue and policy about economic development and environmental issues, and how examining policy dynamics at the level of these understandings (rather than assuming that “economy” and “ecology” mean the same thing for everyone, for example) might help to change both the public conversation and the landscape of economic possibility in Maine.

This research is specifically meant to explore some of the core assumptions that drive development policy and regional planning in the state and to investigate how different assumptions might lead to different options and potential outcomes. How do those engaged in economic development work in Maine understand “the economy” and its relationship to “ecology” or “the environment”? How are these understandings different from one another and from the understandings of those who are working for environmental protection or conservation in the state? What are the political, ethical and practical policy effects of these differences, and what can we learn from them to help us create more effective ways of thinking and communicating about these crucial issues? How might we create new forms of shared understanding about the relationship between economy and ecology that can help to animate effective collective action toward more equitable and sustainable livelihoods in Maine?

What does this research involve? Over the next six months, I will be interviewing a diverse array of economic development and planning professionals, policy-makers, researchers, economic and environmental citizen advocates to discuss the themes described above. You have been invited to participate as an interviewee in this research project because of your involvement with regional economic development issues in Maine. Your participation in this research would involve one interview with me at a time and location convenient for you and appropriate for a quality conversation. Audio recordings of this interview will be made and selectively transcribed, with all of this material remaining confidential. Should you choose to participate, I will contact you to answer any questions you might have, to schedule the interview, and to provide a copy of the consent form which outlines the principles of confidentiality to which I am committed.

How much time will participation in the research project take? In addition to time spent scheduling the interview time and location, the actual interview will be approximately 1.5 hours.

Will the research benefit me? Your participation in the interview will provide an opportunity to step back from the daily work involved in economic development, think about the bigger picture, and engage in discussion about core assumptions, challenges and possibilities. This may offer useful food for thought that can inform your work. In a larger sense, your participation will also be contributing to research that is intended to be shared with you and others working in this field and may itself be useful to ongoing collective thinking about how to move forward in the face of economic development and environmental challenges.

Will participation involve any discomfort for me? Some of the interview questions may address unfamiliar or difficult dimensions to the topic, and some people may experience nervous tension in such a context. Aside from this, no discomfort or other risks are expected. All efforts will be made to create a friendly, professional, comfortable, and conversational atmosphere during the interview.

How is this research paid for? The modest budget for this research project is covered by the Higher Degree Research Fund for postgraduate students at the University of Western Sydney.

Will anyone else know the results? How will the results of this research be disseminated?

All data collected in this research project will remain confidential, and only myself and my academic advisors will have access to recordings and transcripts. In any write-up of this research, all information derived from interviews will be made anonymous so that no individual is identifiable. A participant might be identified in published results, for example, as “an official of a state agency engaged in economic development work,” but not as “deputy director” of a specific department or agency.

The results of this research will be written up in my PhD dissertation, as well as in a number of derivative articles for publication in academic and/or professional journals. I will send you an email at the conclusion of the research project inviting you to obtain an electronic copy of my dissertation should you be interested.

Can I withdraw from the research project? Yes. Your participation in the research project is entirely voluntary and you have the right to decline participation with no consequence. In addition, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time during the interview without explanation and with no consequence.

Can I tell other people about the project? Yes. You are free to tell other people about this research project. They are welcome to contact me to discuss the project and to obtain further information.

How do I get more information? I am happy to discuss this research project with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact me:



Ethan Miller  
Phone: (207) 754-7575  
Email: [Ethan.Miller@uws.edu.au](mailto:Ethan.Miller@uws.edu.au).

What if I have a complaint? The study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The approval number is: H9867.

To speak with my academic advisor, please contact:

Professor Katherine Gibson, University of Western Sydney  
Phone: 011-61-02-9772-6021 (Australia)  
Email: [K.Gibson@uws.edu.au](mailto:K.Gibson@uws.edu.au).

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Office of Research Services:

Phone: 011-61-02-4736-0229 (Australia)  
Fax: 011-61-02-4736-00313 (Australia)  
Email: [humanethics@uws.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@uws.edu.au).

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this research project, you will be asked to sign a Participant Consent Form.



**Participant Consent Form**

**Project Title:** Rethinking Economy and Ecology for Regional Development in Maine

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in the research project entitled "Rethinking Economy and Ecology for Regional Development."

I acknowledge that...

I have read the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher.

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to being interviewed by the researcher, and to having this interview recorded in audio and transcribed for the uses described in the information sheet

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during this research may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that I can withdraw my participation from the research project at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher now or in the future.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Return Address: Ethan Miller, 217 South Mountain Rd. Greene, ME 04236

**NOTE:** This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval Number is H9867. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel (Australia): 02 4736 0883 or 4736 0884). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.