

Queer economies

Possibilities of queer desires and economic bodies (because 'the economy' is not enough)

Evangeline Heiliger

'Please, sir, I want some more.'

5dd06bff51272cee356c70731e79d194

(*Oliver Twist*) ebrary

Queer desires

My mother has an incredible eye for design. Long before AMC's *Mad Men* repopularized modern furniture, she could spot a Herman Miller knockoff from a block away. 'Oh!' she would say, slowing the mint green '76 Pacer for a rolling drive-by. 'One moment, children. I just want to see what's in there.' To this, I would groan and slouch into the seat, knowing what was coming. Praying the neighbors weren't home to watch my mother digging in a pile of trash. Again.

'Why, Mom?' My three siblings and I would protest. 'It's broken! We don't need it!' And she would laugh, shrugging her shoulders and spreading her hands wide as if to ward off responsibility before loading discarded treasures of half-formed chairs, scrap wood, and lamps with shaggy, torn shades into the trunk.

'I just think it's so neat. It has possibility.'

5dd06bff51272cee356c70731e79d194
ebrary Those drive-bys mingled hope and shame for all of us. Hope not only for basic needs but also for beautiful furniture, art, and possibility. My single mother, raising four kids in poverty, dared to have such queer desires in the United States during the Reagan era. Trickle-down economics meant being hungry and wearing ill-fitting, worn-out shoes and underwear. I was taught to feel shame for taking other people's castoffs, called 'scrub' for the dirt presumed to be fused to my skin because we dared to be poor in a stratified society. My mother, a schoolteacher working more than fulltime hours in Ohio, heard warnings about 'welfare queens' and checked her own behavior against white middle-class norms of propriety. She received regular paychecks. Paid taxes. Yet the income she earned wasn't enough to cover basic needs in those early eighties years. We – my family and other poor folks in my community – survived through creative repurposing, charity, bartering, trading, gardening, solidarity, food stamps, luck, and white privilege, as well as work for pay. My mother regularly scavenged trashcans and curbside leavings, browsed discount groceries, secondhand shops, and church sales. My

5dd06bff51272cee356c70731e79d194

ebrary

family repurposed her take-home treasures in a variety of ways: some practical, some pleasurable, some downright embarrassing. This practice has been documented at length elsewhere by Jeff Ferrell, who spent nine months scrounging in Texas as part-fieldwork/part-survival. What Ferrell has found in trashpicking is ‘an economy at the margins – literally – of society’ (2006). In my own experience, while trashpicking might be ‘at the margins’ of mainstream social exchanges, the activities were central to my family and many of those we interacted with. Additionally, we all moved in and through more ‘mainstream’ middle-class spaces such as school, work, and church, often posing or passing as middle-class rather than as poor. As Binnie attests in Chapter 8 of this volume, to be ‘able or empowered, or willing, to articulate a perspective on class within academic spaces can be intimately tied to the performative aspects of classed practices’. My family’s complicated class identity required middle-class performances in particular material and social spaces, despite our material and social entrenchment in poverty. Yet, even as we gained partial upward mobility, there was never any attempt to leave behind trashpicking or other alternative or noncapitalist economic activities that we engaged in during those difficult Reagan years and beyond.¹

Working in ‘the economy’ alone couldn’t satisfy our needs. It still cannot. Trashpicking is just one example of an economic innovation by poor, queer, and working-class people in response to laws and policies that ignore the needs of marginalized folks. Yet rarely are these innovations acknowledged in traditional economic study; they become visible only as ‘alternatives to’ capitalism, and only if economic gains are quantifiable. In development studies, such activities are denigrated as ‘economies of affection’, viewed within that framework as a cause for poverty and a hindrance to progress (Escobar 1995; Scott 1996). The full range of economic activities enacted by poor, queer, and working-class people is missing from economic analysis. As noted by Binnie, class is an analytic of power by which people are differentiated from one another on the basis of differential access to material inequalities. Binnie argues for the integration of class into an intersectional analysis of sexuality, and an integration of sexuality into an intersectional analysis of class. This chapter answers Binnie’s call by utilizing an intersectional sexuality–class analysis of different economic innovations by poor, queer, and working-class folks.

I have a queer desire. I want to convince you that there are worlds of economic activities that go unnoticed in traditional economic study. My goal is to explain the benefits of those ‘other activities’ – the alternative capitalist and noncapitalist activities – despite their being marked as ‘outside’ wage-earning capitalism. I want you to value them because they matter to people’s survival. To do this, I have

- 1 The decision(s) to continue to trashpick, barter, trade, repurpose, and otherwise engage in alternative capitalist and noncapitalist activities was due both to the precariousness of my family’s financial resources and the pleasures those activities provided for creating possibility and access using imagination, time, and repurposed goods.

to blend some strangely personal queer, poor, and working-class stories with a scholarly attempt to dethrone ‘the economy’ as a unified, closed system.

Economic bodies: multiplying vulnerable desires

I argue that queer desires inspire people to engage in clusters of nonnormative economic arrangements. These clusters of economic activity can best be understood metaphorically as ‘economic bodies’. I imagine these economic bodies engaging the world much like living and nonliving bodies interacting with other living and nonliving bodies. They take in nutrients and excrete waste. They create and destroy, mimic and hide, hibernate, reproduce, and die (although not necessarily in that order).² One could consider capitalism as one type of economic body, although certainly not the only type. Economic bodies consist of people, tools, equipment, technical devices, algorithms, as well as non-human substances (e.g. food, plants, minerals, currencies), and actions such as labor, exchanges, and gifting. Economic bodies can exist at a large scale, similarly to how ‘capitalism’ is conceived, or at smaller scales such as micro-economies, families, groups, and individuals.³ The relationships of and between economic bodies can be understood only through engaging a radical analysis that incorporates intersectional analytics of power, including but not limited to gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, embodiment, and other structural forms of power.⁴

2 The porous boundaries of economic bodies hold promise for the queer commons called for by Klapeer and Schönplüg in Chapter 10 of this volume. My insistence that queer economic bodies are inherently relational aligns with their call to de-center the individual in economic policy discussions. Like my colleagues and the queer eco-feminists and eco-sexualists they cite, I envision that more just economies may be possible through recognizing an interconnectedness between living beings. The metaphor of queer economic bodies helps to visualize how ‘being’ rather than ‘having’ a queer identity could play out in practice.

3 While a single person’s activities can be an economic body, there can never be only one economic body – bodies always exist in relation to other bodies, both human and non-human. See Callon and Latour 1981; Callon 1986, 2005; Latour 1987, 2005 for a discussion of human and non-human actors. See also eco-feminist theorists such as Gaard 1997 and Sandilands 2002 for a discussion of the non-boundary between humans, non-human animals, and nature.

4 While concept of ‘actor’ described by Actor Network Theory (ANT) would allow me to pluralize and multiply economic systems, the ANT method has been critiqued by scholars of feminist science studies for not adequately engaging analytics of power associated with structural inequalities, including but not limited to gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, and embodiment. See Quinlan 2012 for a larger discussion of these debates. Like feminist science studies scholar Sandra Harding (2008), I see the potential for ANT (via science and technology studies) and feminist science studies to inform one another’s methods and epistemology. However, it would first be necessary to trace the scholarly arguments in favor of utilizing ANT for queer/feminist research on economics and political economy. This task is beyond the scope and purview of this short chapter, but one I hope to take up in a future project for the possibilities that a feminist ANT could bring to the political economic study of green/queer alternative economies, aka queer economies.

Why not then use the term ‘actor’ as developed by Callon and Latour in actor-network theory (also known as ANT)⁵ (Callon and Latour 1981; Callon 1986, 2005; Latour 1987, 2005)? Latour’s ‘actor’ calls to mind a human being who acts in relation to others, and whose actions can only be understood in connection to others, similarly to how I describe economic bodies functioning relationally to other bodies. Callon describes ‘actors’ as being made up of ‘human bodies but also of prostheses, tools, equipment, technical devices, algorithms, etc.’ (Callon 2005: 4). My description of economic bodies again aligns, although it elaborates further.

My observations of green, queer, and alternative economies (Heiliger 2011, 2012, 2013) leads me to articulate three reasons to use the metaphor of ‘bodies’ in this chapter – rather than ‘actor’, ‘economy’, or ‘economic actor’ – to describe an assemblage of people, parts, relationships, and actions that make up economic activities: (1) to pluralize and multiply economic systems;² (2) to emphasize the vulnerability of the human bodies living and working under conditions of structural inequality;⁶ and (3) to utilize the power of metaphor to insert images of vulnerable economies in the minds of readers. While ANT allows for a multiplying and plurality of economies via its concept of ‘networks’, in which multiple ‘actors’ can (inter)act, ANT does not meet the other two characteristics of green/queer/alternative economies.⁷ My purpose in using ‘bodies’ as a metaphor is to call to mind both the *humans* included in economic activities and their *vulnerability*, a vulnerability mirrored in economic bodies. In *Precarious Life*, feminist and queer scholar Judith Butler writes that the vulnerability of our bodies is what connects us to one another. Our bodies signal ‘dependency, vulnerability, agency: the skin and flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch and to violence’ (2004: 26). This vulnerability of bodies is also what creates porousness: a body’s capacity to help and to harm, to be assisted and to be hurt is interwoven with the dependency of bodies (Butler 2004). Economic bodies are equally vulnerable, a point which I address later in this section.

- 5 Actor-network theory (ANT) is a method of observing the social that explicitly allows for the inclusion of the material-semiotic. Through close observation, a researcher writes thick descriptions, from which analysis might later be drawn. ANT has been taken up primarily in science and technology studies (STS), but also by feminist studies (Quinlan 2012), economic sociology, and the anthropology of markets (Hardie and Mackenzie 2006).
- 6 Although here I emphasize human bodies, both economic bodies and queer economies include human and non-human animals as well as other non-human actors. See Callon and Latour 1981; Callon 1986, 2005; Latour 1987, 2005 for a discussion of human and non-human actors. See also eco-feminist theorists such as Gaard (1997) and Sandilands (2002) for a discussion of the non-boundary between humans, non-human animals, and nature.
- 7 Importantly, this project does not engage in the intense level of thick description that ANT calls for. I sketch details of multiple queer economies according to what was easily determined via internet sources and emailing with participants of the queer economies. For my purposes here, this is adequate to articulate the possibilities of queer economies for conceiving of economics and economic policy in more just ways. ANT, however, would ask a researcher to engage more fully in observation, a task best left for a future project.

I pluralize the metaphor of body, using ‘economic bodies’ (rather than economic body) to counter powerful existing metaphors that promote the idea of a singular, unified, economic totality such as ‘the body of Capitalism’ and ‘the Market’. In making this argument, I align with Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) in recognizing multiple forms of capitalism and the need to partially dis-unify the powerful ideology of ‘the economy’ or ‘Capitalism’ as a closed system. I also draw on embodiment theorists in recognizing the porousness of bodies, and on queer theorists to articulate how queer desires are pursued through economic bodies. The communal, polymorphous, intersubjective components of queer, feminist, and embodiment theories amplify the metaphor of ‘bodies’. The communal, polymorphous, and intersubjective components also diffuse the idea of a monolithic economic process such as ‘the market’ or ‘capitalism’ into easily recognizable clusters of activity. It becomes possible to see my mother’s teaching job, neighborhood foodsharing, charity clothing donations, and trashpicking as a connected cluster of economic activity that enabled my family’s survival, rather than as a capitalist economic activity (teaching job) and several alternative capitalist and noncapitalist activities. Therefore, reading this metaphor of economic bodies through recent scholarship allows a more complex picture of multiple economic processes, particularly those utilized by poor and other marginalized people as survival strategies.

It may appear that the difference between ‘body’ and ‘bodies’ as an economic metaphor is so slight as to be insignificant. Yet recent studies by cognitive scientists Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011, 2013) demonstrate that even slight, one-word differences in the metaphor used to describe a social or political issue can have profound impacts upon decision-making processes by individuals. Metaphors influence the kinds of solutions we think of and also direct us towards solutions that are consistent with the metaphor (Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011). Furthermore, metaphors influence our thinking whether or not we are explicitly aware of the metaphor’s role in our decision-making process (Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2013). Therefore, I argue that those who consider all economic activities part of a singular, unified entity such as ‘the economy’ will seek out economic solutions for a singular, unified economy, convinced these are the best solutions regardless of data. If the same people are willing to think of economics as bodies – as lots of different kinds of ‘people’ moving through the world interacting with other ‘people’ – they will look for economic solutions that meet the needs of diverse people who will function best by interacting with others to meet their needs.⁸

8 Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2013) have noted that in their (US-based) studies of metaphors and decision making about crime, participants’ gender, race/ethnicity, and age do not influence results. However, political affiliation does have some bearing on how one is influenced by metaphors. Thibodeau and Boroditsky found that Republicans are more likely to generate enforcement and punishment for crime-related problems and are less swayed by metaphor than Democrats and independents. It is unknown whether Republicans are similarly less influenced by metaphors about economic or other social issues. This may or may not have implications for economic metaphors such as bodies and ‘people’.

I propose *bodies* as a metaphor for economics because human bodies are not closed systems; they have complex interactions with other bodies and their environments via border crossings of flesh and consciousness ‘more porous than previously imagined’ (Grosz 2001). My family’s intimate engagement with other people’s refuse is one example of blurred boundaries: between us and other families; between work-for-pay and nonmarket activity; and between what no longer has possibility (trash) and what newly has possibility (trash-turned-treasure). Klapceer and Schönplug concept of ‘queer commons’ in Chapter 9 of this volume illustrates the porous boundaries of human bodies more fully. If one considers identity as something formed in relation to others, rather than owned by one’s individual self – as argued by Klapceer and Schönplug – then my family’s class identity and my mother’s queer desires formed in relation to multiple others, both within and adjacent to our class. Human contact is porous in its overlaps: fingerprints left on trash meet fingerprints on trash-turned-treasure,⁹ creating liminal spaces where my family’s queerly classed identity was formed and re-formed. We interacted with one another as family members sharing the same material and social resources, and we brushed up against those whose trash became a means to my family’s desires and survival.

Moira Gatens (1996) argues that the permeability and transitivity of human bodies is possible with any ‘body’ with which we have an affective relation, including corporate social bodies. Pushing out from Gatens, I suggest that economic bodies, as a form of social body, are controlled through human forces, behave in human ways, actively engage with other economic bodies, and utilize forms of social control and power. Bodies are vulnerable to racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and ableism (Butler 2004), which serve neoliberal aims through their visual and discursive association both with certain human bodies and with nonnormative economic bodies. Nonnormative economic bodies include intelligent, deliberate, and relationship-making processes such as bartering, gifting, trading, careshift collectives, trashpicking, and repurposing. However, these economic activities are frequently racialized, feminized, eroticized, and colonized, imagined in economic discourse as geographically located in the global south or in ‘inferior’ areas of the global north (e.g. inner-city urban or lower-class rural) (Escobar 1995). What we imagine about bodies interrelates with the socio-historic formations of economic realities and current understandings of economic ‘truth’. Thus stereotypes about human bodies are transferred onto what we imagine about economic bodies, and imaginings about economic bodies cross the borders of ‘social bodies’ and become soaked up by the sponginess of the diverse human bodies that labor in the environments of that particular economic body. The bodies of the people in an economy – in an economic

9 Taking this concept of porous bodies in relation to a different economic activity, this could also be the liminal moment in which skin cells and scent left on charity clothing meets that produced by our own bodies when we put them on.

body – create meaning for that economy. What we imagine about bodies, our own and others', has powerful effects on how we relate to those bodies. This transitivity of bodies from material to imagined and back again in simultaneous time, combined with the spongelike ability of bodies to hold multiple meanings, is what I refer to here as the porousness of bodies, both human and economic.

How then might we use this porousness of bodies to imagine and engage in productively promiscuous economies? I take up this question in this chapter, offering five examples of porously queer economies that function like human bodies:¹⁰ a single-mother desiring beautiful furniture, art, and possibility despite living in poverty; a homeless person making a livelihood on their own terms; medically altering one's body to better match one's gender regardless of age or ability to pay; moving cross-country despite being told that persons with disabilities ought to be satisfied with their current living situations; and creating social healing through cultivating queer black intergenerational community across state lines and in the absence of legal ties. I demonstrate that these queer desires inspire complex weavings of market, alternative market, and nonmarket economic activities. These blended activities in pursuit of queer desires are what I call 'queer economies'.

Queer economies

I define *queer economies* as economic bodies animated by queer desires. J. Jack Halberstam defines queerness as referring 'to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time' (2005: 6). The 'queer' part of queer desires, in this chapter, signals desires shaped by nonnormative logics of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity – including economic processes – in space and time. When queer desires motivate economic bodies, we can see that queer economies are shaped and moved by human bodies pursuing queer desires. Because queer economies blend economic activities, these kinds of economic bodies have radical potential for transformation, extending options to survive and thrive through deliberately relational activities such as bartering, trading, careshift collectives, and trashpicking.

Another feature of queer economies is their engagement with the erotic. In her seminal essay 'Toward a Queer Ecofeminism' (1997), Greta Gaard articulates how Western culture's devaluing of women, nature, and colonized peoples

10 I offer the first two examples of queer economies from personal experiences and observation in Ohio and California, USA; the remaining three were brought to my attention through queer internet networks. I have included only information easily found via internet resources. These five are not meant to be a complete list of queer economies, but merely to hint at the range of possibilities for queer economies. Members of both TTOSOD and MBHC saw drafts of this essay and were asked to provide input and edits on the portions of the text written about their economic bodies. T*FC did not respond to my email inquiries.

parallels a devaluation of both queerness and the erotic. Scholars such as Arturo Escobar (1995) and Catherine Scott (1996) have made similar claims that economic development discourse conceptually connects nature, women, indigenous people, and colonized nations. Given Gaard's eco-feminist theorization that colonization projects attempting to stamp out queer expressions of gender and sexuality simultaneously created a fear of the erotic (1997), I am intrigued by the idea that erotophobia might be preventing us from valuing a range of economic bodies. Can we conceive of nonnormative economics as queerly erotic bodies, sparking and enflaming queer desires? I can imagine them flaming, butch, dyke, crip, leather, trans*, closeted, polyamorous – even dandy! Yet I wish also to include 'punks' and 'welfare queens' amongst these queerly defined and imagined economic bodies that inspire queer desire (Cohen 1997: 438). For Cathy J. Cohen, using 'queer' politically allows for an expansive definition of identities linked to sexuality, labor, and visibility, a definition that includes those who blur gender/sexual boundaries as well as unmarried mothers or youth who reject capitalism in favor of anarchy. When our queer economics rub up against the skin of other queer economics, there lies powerful potential for desire and economy outside the (re)productive. I suspect many forms of queer economy go unnoticed because they represent refusals to 'sleep with' or 'be faithful to' a white hetero-male-capitalism. Thus, just as lesbians and queer women may be punished for refusing sexual availability to heteronormative demands, so too are queer economics deplored, ignored, and decimated for cheeky 'failures' to live up to capitalist expectations of profit, efficiency, and progress.

One example of a 'failure' to properly engage capitalism is that of contemporary trashpickers in LA County. They are typecast as homeless, male, dirty, and incapable of making rational decisions for their own well-being.¹¹ Yet evidence about scavenging demonstrates that at least some of those assumptions are false: collecting recyclables is a consistent means to make money. It requires skill and awareness, planning and follow-through. Trashpicking also requires patience and a certain amount of strength and mobility, although it doesn't have to be one's own legs or arms – wheelchairs and grabber-sticks are useful tools (Farrell 2006). Scavenging can be effective in teams or solo, or by collaborating with someone for company while collecting for oneself. Trashpicking allows for making a livelihood on one's own terms outside of or in addition to work for pay.

I list trashpicking as evidence of queer economy, partly because my own queer survival has depended upon it. I see it in action in every place I have

11 For examples of these debates in popular media, see Holguin 1993; Carpenter 2010; and Elekes 2012. See also Tapper90020 (2010) 'Garbage Scavenger – Stealing From Trash Cans in Los Angeles, California' and associated user comments, video uploaded to YouTube on 9 August 2010: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTNkTwoZQjQ; and Gus Ugalde (2013) 'Opinion: Los Angeles needs better system to avoid trash, recyclables scavenging' at Boyle Heights Beats/Pulso de Boyle Heights, 8 March 2013: www.boyleheightsbeat.com/opinion-los-angeles-needs-better-system-to-avoid-trash-recyclables-scavenging-2217.

ever traveled or lived. Trash also brushes uncomfortably against the erotic, frequently cast in moral terms as a judgment: as dirty, unclean, something to be discarded and not thought about again. Those who engage in close, embodied contact with trash are categorized in the same way as the trash itself: disposable, unclean, and certainly not compatible with a middle- or upper-class status. At the same time, the embrace of 'trashiness' in popular culture – understood as a gendered and sexualized cultural performance – leaves me loath to romanticize trashpicking. It is dirty work, but hardly immoral: one might even argue that repurposing keeps valuable resources out of landfills and reduces greenhouse gasses, thereby improving local environments. This is where feminist, queer, and antiracist theories help us to see the language and practices used to denigrate particular human bodies. I propose that when we hear sexist, racist, ableist, classist, homophobic, or trans*phobic comments, there is an opportunity to observe queer economies that challenge the unity, singularity, and totality of 'capitalism'.

Why do I suggest that economies function like bodies? Contemporary English-language economic discourse frequently touts both the singularity of economy – '*the* economy is sick' – and economy's presumed human qualities – '*the* economy is *sick*'. Existing descriptions of economies as gendered, racialized, disabled, and otherwise anthropomorphized in human terms bolster my claim that economies are *already* conceived at least partially in embodied terms. The anthropomorphized terms rely on a Western framework that values certain 'masculine-affiliated' qualities over 'feminine-affiliated' others. Catherine Scott illuminates that the gendered nature of economic discourse is fundamental to imbuing imperial and capitalist regimes with unearned power (1995: 4). Yet within this gendered, anthropomorphized language is 'the economy's' Achilles heel. The tendency to anthropomorphize 'the economy' also serves to break down an image of the economy as singular: 'the' economy is variously described as masculine, feminine, hard, soft, sick, dying, racialized, reproducing, and lazy. In paying attention to such discourses, one can only conclude that 'the economy' consistently changes genders, has multiple personalities, or is not as singular in form as dominant hegemonic discourse would lead us to think. Each of these scenarios holds promise for imagining multiple, diverse economic bodies.

Those invested in racism, sexism, ableism, erotophobia, heteronormativity, nationalisms, and colonial power are likely to take my suggestion that there are as many kinds of economies as there are types of human bodies as proof of the superiority of capital 'c' Capitalism (Gibson-Graham 1996), much as they take for granted the privileges and power granted to bodies upholding whiteness, maleness, wholeness, productivity, reason, heterosexism, the nation-state, and imperialism. My argument is not for them. I suggest thinking of economies as bodies so that those invested in valuing a range of diverse human bodies and relationships can claim our queer economies – our labors in service of queer desires – with the same ferocity that we claim our diverse, queer selves.

Benefits of economic bodies

The need for an ‘economies as bodies’ framework grew out of my research on two brands from so-called ‘ethical trade’: Café Femenino® and Product (Red)TM (Heiliger 2011, 2012, 2013). These brands and their campaigns are examples of a larger ‘ethical consumerism’ trend in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, which is a social and economic phenomenon encouraging shoppers, primarily in the global North, to buy products that claim to make the world a better place for all. Gibson-Graham’s dismantling of monolithic ‘Capitalism’ into ‘capitalisms’ (1996) proved critical for describing ways Café Femenino’s Fair Trade economic processes differed from Product (Red)’s version of shopping for a social justice cause. However, once I began to analyse economic activities that blended market, alternative market, and nonmarket transactions, Gibson-Graham’s (1996, 2006) framework of diverse economies no longer effectively described what I observed. One flaw in Gibson-Graham’s description of diverse economies is its limited framing of diverse economies as consisting of transactions/labor/enterprise, which are conceived as taking place in one of three places: (1) markets, (2) alternative markets, or (3) nonmarkets. Depending upon how economic exchanges are compensated, Gibson-Graham categorize economic activities as either (1) capitalist, (2) alternative capitalist, or (3) noncapitalist. Yet economic bodies do not fit neatly into any one of these categories as strictly capitalist, alternative capitalist, or noncapitalist. Instead, diverse economic bodies – including queer economies – overlap different areas of Gibson-Graham’s framework. The actions of economic bodies may include a combination of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and noncapitalist activities. Here, the metaphor of porousness is useful for understanding the ways that queer economies do not have defined boundaries around market, alternative market, and nonmarket activities. Rather, all three of these activities intermingle in queer economies to support nonnormative people as they pursue queer desires for surviving, thriving, and justice. Gibson-Graham’s framework of diverse economies may not preclude the matrix of queer economies. However, it does not adequately theorize the ways queer economies mix economic activities in pursuit of specific queer desires.

Contemporary forms of trade such as ethical consumerism are a merger of capitalisms and alternatives such as Fair Trade (Heiliger 2011; Barnett *et al.* 2008). Instead of describing Café Femenino as functioning under a ‘subsystem of capitalism’ or Product (Red) as ‘a more ethical capitalism’, the framework of economic bodies catalogues each as its own economic body. Both are new economic bodies formed through an economic marriage. These are two different economies that have adapted quickly in response to critiques of globalization, and which play with one another on a global scale, as well as in local markets. In the coffee world, certified Fair Trade became more entrenched in legal documentation, a result that some considered a hindrance to the transformative possibilities of Fair Trade. In response, other forms of ‘ethical’ trade such as transparent contracts and direct trade spun off from Fair Trade and formed their own economic bodies, some

of which continue to engage with formal, certified Fair Trade. Other economic bodies previously considered alternative have modified to more closely resemble conventional trade (e.g. Silk brand soy products). Economic offspring form just as human ones do: through unions sometimes clandestine, occasionally sexy, possibly expensive, but generally without much of note to alert the media.

This merger of ideological interests (if not actual practices) and social justice concerns is strange. It strikes me that current bodies of ethical economics operate a bit like idealized liberal American upwardly mobile heterosexual couples: practical, yet kind. When I am asked to comment on Fair Trade's radical potential, I can only say that I am in favor of Fair Trade in the same way that I am in favor of same-sex marriage. Whereas same-sex marriage allows increased legal benefits, protections, and responsibilities to those who participate, certified Fair Trade provides increased access to global markets, some financial protection, and responsibilities to a cooperative or group of farmers. Yet it must be noted that both same-sex marriage and certified Fair Trade provide benefits only to those who fit a limited profile. To participate in same-sex marriage in the United States, one must have a recognized citizenship and a legally recognized gender, only one adult partner who consents to marry you, money for a marriage license, and access to a state government that permits same-sex marriage. Fair Trade is similarly limited to those who are privileged. To participate in Fair Trade, one must have certification of Fair Trade practices, ownership of or access to land to grow crops, membership in a cooperative, and access to income or assets. Fair Trade provides major social and economic benefits to farmers and producers who participate, yet Fair Trade does not intervene in the lives of the very poorest farmers in most cases (Jaffee 2007). Certainly there are social, legal, emotional, and economic benefits of both Fair Trade and gay marriage to those who participate. However, both are solutions that work within existing legal and economic structures, systems designed to privilege heterosexuality, whiteness, existing wealth, able-bodiedness, and the nation-state. It is undeniable that some people – some bodies – will never be qualified to participate in either project, whereas others will not want to. As Lyn Osseme argues in Chapter 7 of this volume, a teleological view of economic justice can blind observers to those who cannot 'move forward' in the prescribed way. Osseme additionally questions whether justice can possibly be held within the embrace of capitalism. I want to focus primarily on Osseme's critique of attempting to locate justice *within* capitalism, for this leaves room to consider how justice might be struggled for across, through, and around capitalism by those who deliberately engage in queer economics – that is, a variety of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and noncapitalist activities motivated by queer desires – in order to survive and thrive. Therefore, I wish to stipulate that while a framework of economic bodies could chart progressive and liberal economics not usually visible within conventional economic discourse, more is needed to develop this concept in order to locate and describe radical, transformative, queer economics of desire. The next section elaborates on what I mean by queer economic bodies, and articulates ways these economics make queer survival possible.

Queer desires multiply economic possibilities

As I gather evidence of multiple, interrelated, queer economies through a process of witnessing, storytelling, and internet ‘cavesdropping’ (Facebook), it is obvious that queer people – using Cohen’s radical political potential to include a wide range of individuals – co-create communities and economies blending capitalist, alternative capitalist, and noncapitalist activities into economic bodies. These economic bodies become queer economies if the blended activities are used to pursue queer desires shaped by (as Halberstam describes ‘queer’ to indicate) nonnormative logics of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity – including economic processes – in space and time.

One example of this blending for queer desires is the Trans*ition Fund Collective (T*FC), a Tumblr begun in January, 2012 to ‘highlight the projects of trans* individuals fundraising for their transition while sharing some awesome trans*-friendly products and resources. Submissions are always welcome!’ (T*FC; see website in notes at the end of the chapter). More than 15 individuals posted fundraising efforts and personal stories on T*FC during the first month, primarily for surgery and follow-up care for themselves or a loved one. Some fundraisers sell pre-made items such as video games, sex toys, or books, while others offer their skills in trade or to personalize a special gift. Most create art such as t-shirts, screen prints, jewelry, and paintings to fund medical costs. The remaining Tumblr posts include resources, information about moderators Ariel and Codi, binder giveaways, and general encouragement of trans* individuals. I classify the Trans*ition Fund Collective as a queer economy because it is prompted by the nonnormative desire to medically change one’s body to better match one’s self-identified gender, and it blends capitalist (the medical-industrial complex), alternative capitalist (fundraising via Tumblr), and noncapitalist (bartering, trading, and gifting) economic activities. The T*FC additionally manifests queer desires by not focusing solely on profit; its features include strengthening ties between individuals and their supporters via Tumblr. Its use of multiple economic processes (art, bartering, trade, gifting, collaborating, fundraising) alongside an engagement in the medical-industrial complex is an unconventional kind of economic arrangement, an economic body neither fully inside nor wholly outside a conventional profit-making capitalism. Additionally, its relationship-building (supporting, connecting, communicating, promoting) across in-person and internet interactions provides a model of community engagement and transformation for other trans* people.

Porously queer economies

One reason for the intermingling of various economic activities in a porous queer economy may be that the politically queer humans laboring in queer economies are themselves diverse and experience intersecting forms of systemic oppression that must be met with multiple forms of resistance. Engaging in different forms of economic activity – in different kinds of enterprise – is one strategy for resistance

and survival. So, too, is engaging in a variety of relationships and forms of community. An example of a queer economy pursuing ‘nonnormative logics and community’ is a Tumblr called *To the Other Side of Dreaming* (TTOSOD; see website in notes at the end of the chapter). TTOSOD documents the journey of disability justice/transformational justice activists Mia Mingus and Stacey ‘Cripchick’ Milbern to move together from the US south to the Bay Area of California, despite immense economic and social limitations to mobility faced by people with disabilities. In pursuing this endeavor, they said to their communities in the blogosphere:

[We] have decided to live together and create/cultivate interdependent queer disabled korean diasporic radical women of color home together. We are embarking on a journey together to put pieces of disability justice into practice, love each other and live on the other side of dreaming. A huge part of this is our need, as crips, as queers, and women of color, as korean (and all) diasporic people; we need each other and we need you.

(TTOSOD)

Mingus and Milbern ask for assistance finding affordable, accessible housing and creating a community care collective in Berkeley, California, to assist with Milbern’s needs until the state of CA approves her application and provides home assistive care. They transgress complicated state regulations and social norms that make it difficult for persons with disabilities to move. They explicitly name love and healing a variety of inter-related traumas as part of their relationship-building.

The response towards *To the Other Side of Dreaming* in the first two weeks was remarkable: members of their online and in-person community offered advice and connections to affordable housing and began creating a schedule for a care-shift collective. Some online community members sold books, while another friend organized an Etsy shop to raise money for their move and transition.

The kinds of support *To the Other Side of Dreaming* required to prepare to move across the United States differs from the kinds of day-to-day support needed after moving and settling in. Questions of quantity of assistance as well as quality of relationships are critical. Enough people have to be involved to avoid burnout – and those who commit to assisting need to be honest about what they can contribute and for how long. Some ‘allies’ stuck around to provide access for less than six months, perhaps not knowing or caring how their absence can shift a situation of thriving to one of surviving. TTOSOD, as queer economy, relies particularly on creativity, flexibility, and interdependence, as well as access to money, able-bodied persons with access, and state services. In Chapter 7 of this volume, Lyn Ossome challenges the teleological view of most discussions of economic justice, and her arguments apply here: that TTOSOD remains a functioning queer economy, but one that defies the linear narrative of progress and invites the question whether rubbing queer economies against other queer economies is always or necessarily pleasurable, particularly when some economies operate from greater privileges.

Queer economies, queer relationships

Like other economic bodies, queer economies engage in relationship-making and a variety of economic processes for survival of nonnormative human bodies. Some of these processes may look like a poor imitation of capitalisms – for example, so-called ‘economies of affection’ with activities such as gifting, trading, bartering, trashpicking, and repurposing. However, I would argue they no more mock capitalisms than a dildo mocks a penis. Each of these noncapitalist exchanges offers relational pleasures and responsibilities. Profit-making is not the sole point of these economic activities. Relationships and tool-usage matter as much as form and purpose. Gibson-Graham (1999) and Escobar (1995) reveal that a Western ideological framework invisibilizes some economic activities, while denigrating and calling for the destruction of others. Success and survival within this context become linked to one’s ability to perform as an ideal ‘rational’ economic actor for capitalism. As Escobar has argued, ‘through economic sciences (classical political economy) and broader philosophical conceptions (derived from the Enlightenment, utilitarianism, empiricism), this system produced a certain subjectivity, namely, that embodied in the modern producing subject’ (2005: 142). Cultivating a sense of the profit motive was seen as a crucial component of becoming an ideal producer for the global market, while gift-giving, charity, bartering, and other forms of noncapitalist exchange were ridiculed as being non-rational and non-productive (Escobar 1995; Harvey 2005; Scott 1995).

My fifth example of a queer economy embraces many ‘nonrational’ economic activities. Mobile Homecoming (MBHC) is designed by Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, black queer feminist poet and revolutionary, and her partner, Julia Wallace, revolutionary black queer filmmaker, to record the stories of queer black elders in the US. They reached out to online and in-person communities to raise funds for a mobile home to travel to the homes of queer black elders to conduct interviews. Gumbs and Wallace build relationships and raise money through holding freedom schools, selling poetry and books, creating films and teaching resources available online for free and for sale, sharing meals, asking for donations of money, love, and support, and connecting with other queer radicals in North Carolina, USA, and around the globe.

According to Gumbs and Wallace’s MBHC (see website in notes at the end of the chapter), the point of their work is to heal, love, and honor black queers, and to support other revolutionary relationships. MBHC is explicitly not a nonprofit. They write:

We understand that the modes of survival in our black queer communities which include:

- social support organizing
- artistic creativity
- spiritual transformation
- revolutionary interpersonal relationships

are our key resources as we transform the meaning of life.

(MBHC website)

MBHC is queer economy for its intentional mixing of monetary exchange, creative resourcefulness, and deliberate community-building meant to generate love and structural healing. Celebrating the full range of black queerness fundamentally shapes MBHC and affiliated projects. ‘Community’ is defined not by geographic boundaries, nor by boundaries around race or gender, but by reaching out to like-minded social revolutionaries working for justice. There are thousands of people who belong to Gumbs and Wallace’s community – their project of celebrating black queer love and honoring queer intergenerational connection through listening projects and recording history clearly speaks to many. This is one example of how queer economies function – through connections, networks of respect and mutuality, and by speaking truth to power.

Because ‘the economy’ is never enough: desiring (more) queer economic bodies

In this chapter, I analyse five examples of queer economies to begin to think through what makes queer economies *queer*, and what makes queer economies *valuable*. In considering what makes queer economies queer, first, they are a type of economic body animated by queer desires. Economic bodies are inherently relational. Second, queer economies differ conceptually from ‘the economy’, because they are not a singular, unified entity like ‘Capitalism’ – they are multiple and allow us to ‘have some more’. Third, queer economies differ from Gibson-Graham’s framing of multiple economies (as capitalisms, alternative capitalisms, or noncapitalisms) because queer economies – like many economic bodies – weave together two or more kinds of economic activities in pursuit of queer desires. Finally, queer economies function differently from other economic bodies because they focus on nonnormative arrangements of community and relationship-building while pursuing queer desires.

The value of queer economies comes from this bundle of characteristics. The relationship-making aspects of queer economies are as important as their plurality and their blending of economic activities. Relationship-making – between people and between economies – enables queer economies to sidestep larger structural forces that disenfranchise queer people and thwart queer desires. Specifically, TTOSOD and MBHC name desires such as *love* and *healing personal and structural wounds* as key goals motivating the activities of their economic bodies. Attempting to diffuse or heal structural harms is also clear in T*FC’s use of Tumblr to provide emotional support for trans* youth who experience social pressure to pretend to be the sex/gender assigned to them at birth. Scavengers like my family and trashpickers in Los Angeles have a nonnormative relationship with trash, which pushes back against structural norms that insist ‘nice people’ spend money to pursue their desires or that those who don’t have money don’t deserve to thrive. One reason queer economies might be difficult to identify and describe is that many are utilizing forms of alternative and noncapitalist exchange that are typically categorized as non-economic. Queer economies work differently from how we have been taught that capitalisms function, even as queer economies

operate through, within, and outside them. Therefore, queer economies have the potential to create justice through desires for nonnormative logics of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity – including economic processes – in space and time.¹² This requires flexibility and creativity, as well as the pleasurable and often-difficult work of building relationships and being accountable for our actions.

Re-theorizing economics as bodies is not merely an intellectual exercise – I mean to multiply our options for engaging in economic activities. Naming and describing queer economies makes clear the unconscious links between economics-as-bodies and the embodied persons laboring within them in service of queer desires. So I ask: what queer desires move your economic bodies? What relationships must you engage in to manifest your desires? With whom will your economic bodies collaborate, flirt, merge, avoid, fight, make up, bargain, or trade? What – or who – will your queer economies long for? Applying our ideas about human bodies leads to greater recognition of – and perhaps participation in – economies *already* animated by queer desires and justice. What will your queer economies do? Because ‘the economy’ simply isn’t enough to hold all your queer possibilities.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the editors and co-contributors of this volume, as well as the participants of the Desiring Just Economies/Just Economies of Desire conference for their feedback and intellectual engagement, and thank you to Chris Littleton and the UCLA Women’s Studies (now Gender Studies) Department for financial support to attend the DJE/JED conference in Berlin in 2010. Thank you especially to Antke Engel, Carole Browner, Katie Oliviero, and J. Jack Halberstam for seeing the promise of this chapter during its embryonic stages. My gratitude goes to my writing accountability community: NCFDD, Kayla D. Hales, Jennifer Freeman Marshall, David Perez II, Kerry Ann Rockquemore, and Jessica Millward. Thank you to Stacy Milbern, Mia Mingus, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Julia Wallace for their willingness to correspond with me about their queer economies. My thanks always to Van Nguyen for making the world outside my head even more pleasurable than my lengthy romps through the fields of feminist/queer studies.

References

- Barnett, C., Cloke, P., Clarke, N. and Malpass, A. (2005) ‘Consuming Ethics: Articulating the Subjects and Spaces of Ethical Consumption’, *Antipode* 37: 23–45.
- Butler, J. (2004) *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London/New York: Verso Press.

12 This definition of queer is borrowed from J. Jack Halberstam 2005.

- Callon, M. (1986) 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay', in J. Law (ed.) *Power, Action, Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 196–233.
- (2005) 'Why Virtualism Paves the Way to Political Impotence: A Reply to Daniel Miller's Critique of *The Laws of the Markets*', *Economic Sociology: European Electronic Newsletter* 6(2): 3–20.
- Callon, M. and Latour, B. (1981) 'Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macro-Structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them Do So', in K. Knorr Cetina and A.V. Cicourel (eds) *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro- Sociologies*, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 277–303.
- Carpenter, S. (2010) 'Los Angeles is Banking on Recycling', *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 2012. Available online at <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/greenspace/2010/03/los-angeles-banking-on-recycling.html> (accessed 27 November 2014).
- Cohen, C. J. (1997) 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3(4): 437–65.
- Elkes, G. (2012) 'The Blue Bin Scavengers – Recycling and L.A.'s Lost Treasure', *North Hollywood-Toluca Lake Patch*, 18 April 2012. Available online at <http://northhollywood.patch.com/groups/gerald-elkess-blog/p/bp--the-blue-bin-scavengers-recycling-and-las-lost-treasure> (accessed 27 November 2014).
- Escobar, A. (1995) *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (2005) 'Economics and the Space of Modernity: Tales of Market, Production and Labour', *Cultural Studies* 19(2): 139–75.
- Farrell, J. (2006) *Empire of Scrounge: Inside the Urban Underground of Dumpster Diving, Trash Picking, and Street Scavenging*, London/New York: New York University Press.
- Gaard, G. (1997) 'Toward a Queer Ecofeminism', *Hypatia* 12(1):114–37.
- Gatens, M. (1996) *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*, London: Routledge.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (1996, 2006) *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*, London/Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Grosz, E. A. (2001) *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*, Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Halberstam, J. J. (2005) *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York/London: New York University Press.
- Hardie, I. and MacKenzie, D. (2007) 'Assembling an Economic Actor: The Agencement of a Hedge Fund', *Sociological Review* 55(1): 57–80.
- Harding, S. (2008) *Sciences From Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and Modernities*, Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Heiliger, E. (2011) *Shopping Our Way to a Better World? Redefining Gender, Sexuality and Moral Citizenship Under Ethical Consumerism* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.
- (2012) 'Ado(red), Abhor(red), Disappea(red): Fashioning Race, Poverty, and Morality Under Product (Red)TM', in S. Tarrant and M. Jolles (eds) *Fashion Talks: Undressing the Power of Style*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 149–64.

- (2013) ‘Coffee “Tied With a Pink Ribbon”: Transgender Phenomena and Transnational Feminisms in Twenty-First Century Ethical Consumer Movements’, *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 13(2). Available online at <http://reconstruction.cserver.org/Issues/132/Heiliger.shtml> (accessed 2 April 2015).
- Holguin, R. (1993) ‘Walking Off With Trash for Cash’, *Los Angeles Times*, 9 September 1993. Available online at http://articles.latimes.com/1993-09-09/news/hl-33157_1_scavengers-new-recycling-recycling-program (accessed 27 November 2014).
- Jaffee, D. (2007) *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability and Survival*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.
- Latour, B. (1987) *Science in Action*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quinlan, A. (2012) ‘Imagining a Feminist Actor-Network Theory’, *International Journal of Actor-Network Theory and Technological Innovation* 4(2): 1–9.
- Sandilands, C. (2002) ‘Lesbian Separatist Communities and the Experience of Nature: Toward a Queer Ecology’, *Organization and Environment* 15(2): 131–63.
- Scott, C. V. (1996) *Gender and Development: Rethinking Modernization and Dependency Theory*, Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Thibodeau, P. H. and Boroditsky, L. (2011) ‘Metaphors We Think With: The Role of Metaphor in Reasoning’, *PLoS ONE* 6(2): e16782.
- (2013) ‘Natural Language Metaphors Covertly Influence Reasoning’, *PLoS ONE* 8(1): e52961.

Websites

Café Femenino Coffee Project: www.cafefemenino.com

Mobile Homecoming (MBHC) Project: www.mobilehomecoming.org

Product (Red)TM: www.joinred.com/red

To the Other Side of Dreaming: <https://digitalsisterhood.wordpress.com/2011/05/19/congratulations-to-the-2011-digital-sisters-of-the-year-stacey-milbern-and-mia-mingus>

Trans*ition Fund Collective: The Self Made Men: <http://trans-itionfundcollective.tumblr.com>