



imagining life beyond “the economy”

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for the occupiers



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contrary to the usual” (as in “obverse”). *Capere* is “to take, to seize.” At the same time, “to occupy” is “to employ, to make use of, to exercise one’s craft.” (from the *Oxford English Dictionary*)

19. A larger version of this circle, with descriptions of many of the initiatives listed on it, can be downloaded here: [http://www.geo.coop/files/Solidarity%20Economy\\_Circle%20and%20Key.pdf](http://www.geo.coop/files/Solidarity%20Economy_Circle%20and%20Key.pdf). For more on solidarity economy linkages, see Ethan Miller, “Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues,” in Emily Kawano, Tom Masterson, and Jonathan Teller-Ellsberg (Eds), *Solidarity Economy I: Building Alternatives for People and Planet*. Amherst, MA: Center for Popular Economics, 2010. This can be downloaded at: [http://www.communityeconomies.org/site/assets/media/Ethan\\_Miller/Miller\\_Solidarity\\_Economy\\_Key\\_Issues\\_2010.pdf](http://www.communityeconomies.org/site/assets/media/Ethan_Miller/Miller_Solidarity_Economy_Key_Issues_2010.pdf)

20. See Yashna, “Communities of Care, Organizations for Liberation.” OrganizingUpgrade.com. <http://www.organizingupgrade.com/2011/07/yashna-communities-of-care/>

21. Note that I am *not* advocating for the #occupations to develop lists of demands. I am speaking about the larger movements to which they are (and will increasingly be) connected.

22. See, for example, the work of the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE): <http://www.livingeconomies.org>.

23. Check out the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives for more information: <http://www.usworker.coop>

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[me?contentidonly=true&contentid=2009/04/0094.xml](http://www.cltnetwork.org/index.php?fuseaction=Main.MemberList)). Additionally, there are more than 250 community land trusts—cooperatively owed and democratically controlled parcels of land to support affordable housing and other projects—in the U.S. (National Community Land Trust Network: <http://www.cltnetwork.org/index.php?fuseaction=Main.MemberList>), and hundreds of local currencies and barter networks of all kinds (see Community Currency Magazine’s directory for just a few of these: <http://www.ccmag.net/directory>). The Data Commons Project is working to develop a more comprehensive directory of alternative economy initiatives of all kinds. The in-progress prototype can be found at: [www.find.coop](http://www.find.coop)

11. See, for example, David Holmgren, *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability*. Holmgren Design Services, 2002; and Bill Mollison, *Permaculture: A Practical Guide for a Sustainable Future*. Island Press, 1990.

12. Freya Mathews describes these various practices as pointing toward the possibility of economies of biosynergy: that is, forms of livelihood that not only refrain from destroying ecosystems, but work to heal and enhance them. See Freya Mathews, “The Moral Ambiguities In the Politics of Climate Change,” in Ved Nanda (Ed), *Climate Change and Environmental Ethics*. New York: Transaction Publishers, 2010.

13. This is a distinction that comes from Karl Polanyi, *The Livelihood of Man*. New York: Academic Press, 1977.

14. For some theory that supports this critique, see Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics.” *The American Political Science Review*, vol.85, no.1, 1991.

15. For more on “solidarity economics,” see the resource library at <http://www.solidaritynyc.org>

16. See J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

17. Quoted in Diane Dumanoski, *The End of the Long Summer: Why We Must Remake Our Civilization to Survive On a Volatile Earth*. New York: Crown Publishing, 2010, p.213. Emphasis mine.

18. Occupy: from *ob - capere* (Latin). The “ob-” can mean “in the directions of, towards,” and at the same time “against,” or “in a direction or manner

*“Fall in love with hard and patient work—we are the beginning, not the end.”*

-Žižek, at #OccupyWallStreet

## An Introduction

**#**OccupyWallStreet has cracked open a little hole in history, creating a moment where some of the very core institutions of our economy are called into question. Along with indignation and outrage, there is a certain excitement in the air. Things that have been terrifyingly stuck seem to be moving. Something seems possible today that *wasn't* just a month ago. In this space, our conversations and our imaginations are buzzing. What are we doing? What should we do? What's coming next? In particular: as we condemn this economy built for the benefit of the 1%, *what do we want in its place, and how will we build it?*

This text, grounded in several years of collective thinking and writing, is meant to be a contribution to this vibrant conversation. My basic premise is this: if we want to effectively envision and create alternatives to the economy of Wall Street, we need to re-think the very concept of “the economy” itself. We have inherited an economics that stifles our imaginations and dampens our collective sense of power and possibility. Only by telling new stories about what economies *are* (and might yet be) can we most effectively kindle the fires of our creative, transformative work to build new forms of livelihood.

I propose here a set of five core economic principles for “rethinking the economy” that might be helpful steps in this process, and may also usefully inform the direction of our concrete strategies. These are not proposals for an alternative economic “system” to replace the current one. They are, rather, *tools* to support our diverse, collective work of imagining new livelihoods *together*. This text is part theory, part strategy and part call-to-action for the immediate and long-term work of identifying and seizing spaces of democratic practice (occupy!), linking them together in networks of mutual support and recognition (connect!), and

drawing on our collective strength to actively create new ways of meeting our needs and making our livings (create!).

The #Occupy Movement is a vital spark, already creating and demonstrating—in public experiments with democracy and solidarity across the U.S. and the world—elements of the new economies we are working to build. This movement calls us toward long-term commitments, generations of work that we have only just begun. Everything is at stake.

I refer quite often, in these pages, to a “we.” Who is this “we”? It is everyone who reads these words and finds some resonance with them; it is everyone who participates in the larger conversation (of which this text is one tiny part) about what it means to be alive at this moment in history, and about what it means to respond to the urgent call for *occupation*, *connection* and *creation*. The “we” is you, and you, and you, and I, who are ready to roll up our sleeves and get to work on building a different way of living together on this earth.

### **This Is Our Moment**

The #Occupy Movement that is spreading like wildfire across the United States and around the world is a *wake-up call*. We are standing at the edge of the world as we know it, and the question is whether our future will simply happen to us, or if we will participate in its making.

We’re in a hell of a mess. Major economies of the world are coming unravelled, teetering at the edge of all-out crisis and living by the fickle mercy of volatile financial markets. Many of us who once relied on the basic economic institutions of our societies— education, employment, healthcare, public infrastructure, retirement, social assistance in times of need—are confronting the brutal reality that such faith is no longer merited. Meanwhile, the “experts” poised to deal with this mess are working in the service of the very institutions that profit from it. Nor do we have any reason to believe that their ideas, which have torn apart our lives, our communities and our environment, have anything to offer us in the work of weaving them back together.

Buck-Morss, “Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display,” *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 21, Issue 2, 1995. For an elaborate argument about the sketchy relationships between economics and physics, see Philip Mirowski, *More Heat Than Light: Economics As Social Physics, Physics as Nature’s Economics*. Cambridge University Press, 1989. For an account of some ways in which early economists such as Adam Smith actively hid the role of enclosures in making the economy they were writing about, see Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation*. Duke University Press, 2000.

6. For more on contemporary enclosures, see *The Commoner*, Issue 2, 2001 (<http://www.commoner.org.uk/index.php?p=5>) and Issue 7, 2002 (<http://www.commoner.org.uk/index.php?p=7>) among others, and David Bollier, *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of Our Common Wealth*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

7. For more on this shift in perspective from a monolithic “economy” to a diverse landscape of practices, see J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006; and Jenny Cameron and J.K. Gibson-Graham, “Feminising the Economy: Metaphors, Strategies, Politics.” *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 10, No.2, p.145-157; also other work of the Community Economies Collective: <http://www.communityeconomies.org>

8. Massimo De Angelis offers a powerful framework for thinking about values and “value struggles” in his book *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto Press, 2007). He draws on David Graeber’s concept of “value as the importance of action” in David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

9. Iceberg image adapted from an original by Ken Byrne, published in J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

10. To put a few numbers into the mix: A recent study by the USDA shows that 29,000 cooperative businesses in the U.S. employ more than 2 million people. This includes over 200 worker-owned cooperatives and 26,844 consumer-owned cooperatives (many of which are credit unions-- non-profit alternatives to corporate banks). These are all businesses “mutually owned and democratically controlled by members who benefit from its products and services.” (See <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdaho>

“Other Economies Are Possible”: Special section of Dollars & Sense on “solidarity economy” (in collaboration with Grassroots Economic Organizing): [http://www.geo.coop/files/Other%20Economies%20Are%20Possible\\_GEO%20Section%20of%20D&S.pdf](http://www.geo.coop/files/Other%20Economies%20Are%20Possible_GEO%20Section%20of%20D&S.pdf)

“Solidarity and Participatory Economics” (Michael Albert): <http://www.zcommunications.org/solidarity-and-participatory-economics-by-michael-albert>

“Solidarity Economics: Building New Economies from the Bottom-Up and the Inside-Out” (Ethan Miller): [http://www.communityeconomies.org/site/assets/media/Ethan\\_Miller/Miller\\_Solidarity%20Economics%20\(2005\).pdf](http://www.communityeconomies.org/site/assets/media/Ethan_Miller/Miller_Solidarity%20Economics%20(2005).pdf)

“What Is Solidarity Economics?” (Luis Razeto): <http://www.luisrazeto.net/content/what-solidarity-economics>

Also see the entry at p2pfoundation.net: [http://p2pfoundation.net/Solidarity\\_Economics](http://p2pfoundation.net/Solidarity_Economics)

## Notes

1. Paul Krugman. “Confronting the Malefactors.” *New York Times*. October 6, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/opinion/krugman-confronting-the-malefactors.htm>
2. See, for example: Rene Dumont, *From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology*. University of Chicago Press, 1977; Also Timothy Mitchell, “Fixing The Economy.” *Cultural Studies*. Vol.12, Issue 8, p. 82-101.
3. For at least some of this story, see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*. Beacon Press, 1971 ; and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Penguin, 1991.
4. Nothing short-circuits political possibility like an appeal to “nature.” More more on this, see Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Harvard University Press, 2004.
5. For some academic work on the role of measurement and graphical representation in the making of “the economy,” see Timothy Mitchell, “Fixing The Economy.” *Cultural Studies*. Vol.12, Issue 8, 1998; and Susan

And what if these experts *could* “fix” our economy? What if we *could* convince them to “curb the excesses of Wall Street” and get our economic engine “back on track”? This demand would ignore the fact that the very *success* of the capitalist market economy—the ways in which it has seemingly provided so many with so much in so short a time—is *built* on violence and plunder. For every glorious triumph of economic growth and progress, there has always been another story unfolding behind the magic curtain: the story of enclosure and colonization, of slavery and military coercion, of the exploitation of working people, of the suppression of struggles for dignity and justice, of the unravelling of culture and community, and of the looting and destruction of ecosystems around the world.

The sorcery of capitalist economics is precisely to make its own violence invisible, so that it can appear to be nothing but the miraculous liberator of human potential and the progressive deliverer of ever-abundant goods. And there is a disturbingly good reason for us to give in to this illusion: most of us are *dependent* on the very economy that has systematically exploited us and undermined the health of our communities and our environments. We have come to *rely* on the very “job creators” (that new euphemism for exploiters) whose project of profiting at our expense we condemn. We have come to need the very economic growth machine that is eating our world and destabilizing our planetary climate in the name of “progress.”

We can no longer ignore the immense challenge at the heart of this moment in history: We are trapped in patterns of life on which we have come to depend, but which we must fundamentally transform as a matter of our very survival. How do we acknowledge our dependence, and address the needs that it gives rise to, while also imagining and constructing new forms of freedom?

The politics of our age must be the politics of our *creative and collective escape* from this historical trap. We are called toward new ways of understanding our realities and experiencing our capabilities. We are called to work in solidarity with each others’ daily struggles to gain footholds of stability on which to build a different future. We are

called to imagine and create new ways of meeting our needs and living together on this shared earth. We are called to participate not just in the emergence of new movements, but of new *forms of living*. This is not about “reform” nor “revolution,” but about how we build relationships, communities, and institutions that simultaneously meet our immediate needs and open up possibilities for other forms of livelihood. As the old ways crumble, as we face the non-viability of the economic machine that has chewed us up and spit us out, this is no longer a matter of “alternatives.” It is a matter of *survival*.

And so it’s time to play for keeps.

This work challenges us at many levels. We are learning how to cooperate and how to be democratic people, struggling against a culture that has taught us otherwise. We are learning how to work on ourselves, facing up to our inherited “shit” with honesty, courage and compassion, so that we can become the change we wish to see. We are discovering new forms of satisfaction and identity as we leave the world of endless consumption behind. We are creating new forms of trust, inventing new forms of community, and building new forms of personal and collective security beyond bank accounts, retirement funds and formal employment. We are developing new skills and new forms of awareness as we create livelihoods connected to our places and contexts. We are learning from struggles of the past and, with the strength of this wisdom, imagining new forms of collective action to take back land, water, housing, healthcare, culture, infrastructure, and institutions of governance from those who have enclosed them for private profit at our expense.

To strengthen all of this work, we are beginning to tell new stories.

This part of our task cannot be underestimated. The #Occupy Movement is directly confronting, in ways not seen for generations, the power of the economic status quo. We are up against the most sacred institutions of our society, and challenging some of the most powerful stories that our civilization has told over the past two hundred years. These are stories that run deep, and that structure our imaginations and political

## Resources

#Occupy Wall Street: [www.occupywallst.org](http://www.occupywallst.org)

#Occupy Together: [www.occupytogether.org](http://www.occupytogether.org)

Grassroots Economic Organizing: [www.geo.coop](http://www.geo.coop)

Community Economies Collective: [www.communityeconomies.org](http://www.communityeconomies.org)

SolidarityNYC: [www.solidaritynyc.org](http://www.solidaritynyc.org)

Z-Net: [www.zcommunications.org/znet](http://www.zcommunications.org/znet)

The Commoner: [www.commoner.org.uk](http://www.commoner.org.uk)

U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives: [www.usworker.coop](http://www.usworker.coop)

U.S. Solidarity Economy Network: [www.ussen.org](http://www.ussen.org)

Cultivate.coop: [www.cultivate.coop](http://www.cultivate.coop)

Data Commons Project Cooperative Directory: [www.find.coop](http://www.find.coop)

Community-Wealth.org: [www.community-wealth.org](http://www.community-wealth.org)

On The Commons: [www.onthecommons.org](http://www.onthecommons.org)

Yes! Magazine: [www.yesmag.org](http://www.yesmag.org)

Shareable.net: [www.shareable.net](http://www.shareable.net)

## Further Reading on Solidarity Economics

“Towards an Economy Worth Occupying” (Cheyenna Weber): <http://www.organizingupgrade.com/2011/10/an-economy-worth-occupying/>

“Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues” (Ethan Miller): [http://www.communityeconomies.org/site/assets/media/Ethan\\_Miller/Miller\\_Solidarity\\_Economy\\_Key\\_Issues\\_2010.pdf](http://www.communityeconomies.org/site/assets/media/Ethan_Miller/Miller_Solidarity_Economy_Key_Issues_2010.pdf)

“Solidarity Economics” (Euclides Mance): <http://turbulence.org.uk/turbulence-1/solidarity-economics/>

this prize: the possibility of diverse, dignified, democratic and cooperative livelihoods available to all.

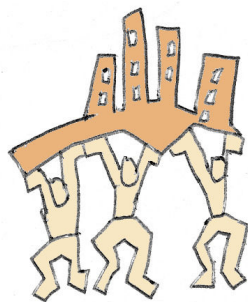
Do we know how to make this possible? Not yet.

But we can say this: It is time to launch the largest explosion of practical experimentation that our society has ever seen.

To do this work, we must all begin to imagine our lives differently. What does it mean to stand on the edge of everything we once took for granted and choose to step into the unknown? Alone, this work is terrifying. Together, it becomes an adventure in living. We need to begin imagining lives in which our forms of security (if we have them at all) do not lie in the structures held up by Wall Street or beholden to the banks and corrupt governments. We need to begin exploring the possibility of new forms of security, new forms of resilience. Not in banks or retirement funds, not even in money, but in *relationships*, in *community*, in *commons*, in common skills, common land, common resources, and common movements of people experimenting, imagining and building a different life together.

This creative experimentation cannot ignore the work of long-term visioning, the work of developing and debating blueprints and maps for the future we seek to create; but nor can we get stuck in the all-too-common and dangerous demand for “an alternative.” There is no singular “economy,” and there will be no singular alternative. This is a path of many paths, and the work of many hearts and minds. We are a *movement*, not a destination.

This is going to be a hell of an adventure.



sensibilities in ways that we are often barely aware of. It is all-too-easy for us to challenge the inequities of our economy without questioning the very concept of “the economy” itself.

We might be tempted to agree with Paul Krugman when he writes that “it’s clear what kinds of things the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators want, and it’s really the job of policy intellectuals and politicians to fill in the details.”<sup>1</sup> This would be our worst mistake. The peril that we must avoid at all costs is to hand over our power, once again, to the self-righteous economists and the pragmatic managers of the financial machine.

This is *our* moment.

This is the time when we must refuse to accept the old ideas, the old concepts, the old stories. This is the time when we need to create new, shared stories about what it means to be alive together, about what it means to make a living, about what is possible for us to dream of and create, and about how it is that *we*, the people, will make a future for ourselves.

If the economists want to join us, all the better. But they can check their economic “laws” at the door, thank you very much.

### **The Name of the Trap Is “The Economy”**

At every step in our work for a more just, democratic and ecologically-viable world, we are haunted by this thing called “the economy.” We know that “it” doesn’t work, that “it” is broken, that “it” has served the interests of the wealthy and powerful for generations, that “it” has systematically undermined the health of life on earth, and that “it” needs to be fundamentally changed. And yet at the same time, we confront this economy as if it were a force of nature, a weather-like system that batters us with its shifting whims. At best, it appears as a massive and complex infrastructure of institutions, primarily owned and ruled by the “1%” and managed by obscure experts running elaborate mathematical computer models. They whisper into politicians’ ears behind

closed doors while the rest of us are locked out. At worst, it is a hurricane barreling toward our shores, tracked by satellites and mapped on charts, but beyond mortal control. We board up our windows (if we haven't already lost our homes to foreclosure) and pray.

What *is* this thing?

First and foremost, it is a *story*. A story designed to stop politics, to shut down ethics, and to stifle our imaginations. "The economy" is a way of thinking and experiencing the world in which our power and agency is robbed from us. In this story, the economy is portrayed as a massive, unified system, a thing that we're *inside of* that is animated by specific "laws" and "logics." It is for others to deal with, manage, or fix, and we are to simply follow their commands. We'll vote in the next election for someone to tell us, after consulting with the experts, what we must sacrifice, change, or accept in order for the economy to get growing again. "Democracy" is the name for all the minor tinkering we're allowed to do inside the space in which this economy has us locked.

But there is a dirty secret here that we weren't taught in school or on the news: the whole concept of "the economy" has existed for less than two hundred years! No human beings in history, prior to Europeans in the early 18th century, lived in anything like what we today call "the economy." In order for us to find ourselves inside an "economy," this economy had to be *made*.<sup>2</sup> It did not emerge from some "natural" process of inevitable evolution; it was constructed, often violently, by specific groups of people and specific institutions in order to serve their purposes. "The economy" was not a reality that was "discovered" by some brilliant economists: it was a *project of the elites* from its very origins.

This economy was constructed by processes of enclosure, where people were forcibly separated from their means of subsistence (land, community, tools and skills) and pushed into dependence on wage-jobs and commodity purchases. It was constructed by the legal and military authority of centralized states who sanctioned the private property of elites and enforced their contracts. It was constructed by the specific, politically-enforced organization of wage jobs, in which workers were systematically excluded from democratic ownership and control over

obey orders rather than think for themselves cannot be a democratic society. We need jobs that embody, in their daily workings, the kind of broader society we seek to cultivate.<sup>23</sup>

*Ecologically-restorative jobs*: it's time to be serious, too, about forms of employment that are not dependent on the ongoing destruction of the ecological base upon which we all rely. "Green jobs" that seek to sustain our current levels of consumption and production in a "sustainable" form will not do. We must create forms of work that are synergistic with our common habitats.

Beyond (but supported by) our demands, then, we must take the initiative in creating locally-rooted jobs in workplaces that we *own, manage and share together*, and that *enhance the resilience, stability and health of our ecological communities*.

At the same time, we need to keep the second view in sight: a world of livelihood beyond employment. We must shift from simply asking how we might create more (or better) jobs to asking about *how we can progressively create the conditions in which we no longer need them*.

First, how can we begin to build a world in which the unpaid labor of birthing, parenting, caring for elders, building community, creating art, working for justice, and defending and restoring our ecosystems can be supported as shared social goods? What kinds of accounting would make this work and its value publicly visible? What structures for supporting each other and sharing surplus can make this work more viable and sustainable?

And second, how do we *re-common* the enclosures that created our dependency on wage-work in the first place? How do we construct forms of direct, collective access to our means of subsistence? How do we make growing our own food, gathering and sharing resources collectively, producing for ourselves at home and in cooperative communities, building our own housing, providing our own non-monetized networks of support and care, all the more possible and viable? Life beyond "jobs" is not for everyone, and nor does it need to be. But it must become an ever-more available option. Let us keep our eyes on



will we learn to create and live in new forms of face-to-face relationship and community so that these things can be shared? How will we imagine and fight for institutions and policies that will enable our work of building these forms of livelihood together? How can we learn from those who have gone before, and those who are here now in our communities, experimenting with collective and democratic ways of life? What kinds of support structures of connection, collaboration and common work can we create through which to sustain this emerging work? How will we move the spaces of #occupied parks to the spaces of a re-occupied *world*?

There are two views that we must keep in sight, never letting go of either:

The first view is the need to build and fight for stability and security for ourselves, each other, our families, our communities and those with whom we're connected around the world, here-and-now. This is where we demand<sup>21</sup> (and the list can go on): equitable social policies, demilitarization, restructuring of financial systems, debt forgiveness on multiple fronts, trade policy oriented toward economic justice, public investment in post-carbon conversion and ecological restoration, free education for all, and fiscal policies which significantly and progressively redistribute wealth from the 1% to the rest, particularly those who have been systematically excluded even from the shrinking "middle class." This is where we must work also, recognizing our dependency on that which we must transform, for job creation. But not just *any* job creation. We need to demand public (and private) resources to help us develop new kinds of jobs:

*Locally-rooted jobs*: it's time to refuse the myth that jobs must be given to us by huge, "outside" forces which are unaccountable to our needs, our stories and our places. We need jobs that build on and enhance local and regional strengths, that reflect the aspiration and values of our specific communities, and that are responsible to other communities around the world with whom we are connected.<sup>22</sup>

*Cooperative jobs, worker- and community-controlled jobs*: it's time to publicly proclaim that a society in which a majority of people spend their days working under the rule of dictators (bosses) and learning to

the products of their own labor. It was constructed through the outright theft of life, labor, land and resources from people in colonized places around the world. It was constructed in concert with a notion of "nature" that enabled living beings to be turned into exploitable objects, and for ecosystems to become nothing but mines and dumping grounds. It was constructed by the ongoing, violent suppression of social movements seeking to transform all of these relationships.<sup>3</sup>

Along the way, there were theorists who wrote about this economy as if it were a fact of nature, the evolution of an inevitable pattern built into the very core of humanity and the world.<sup>4</sup> They told stories about how self-interested bartering "savages" evolved markets and became civilized humans. They told stories about the "laws" that could be discovered at the heart of economic dynamics: supply and demand, maximization of gains, the necessity for growth, the harsh yet efficient reality of endless competition, the "productive" accumulation of wealth in the hands of powerful "job creators." And they made these laws seem even more natural and inevitable by developing forms of measurement that "confirmed" them, crafting elaborate graphs and charts to "demonstrate" them, and drawing on mathematics and metaphors from physics to place their theories beyond the reach of politics and society.<sup>5</sup>

It was a perfect scenario: the ruling elites could systematically institute this new economy through enclosure and violence, all the while drawing on the theory of the economists to show that this economy was nothing more than the inevitable unfolding of human nature.

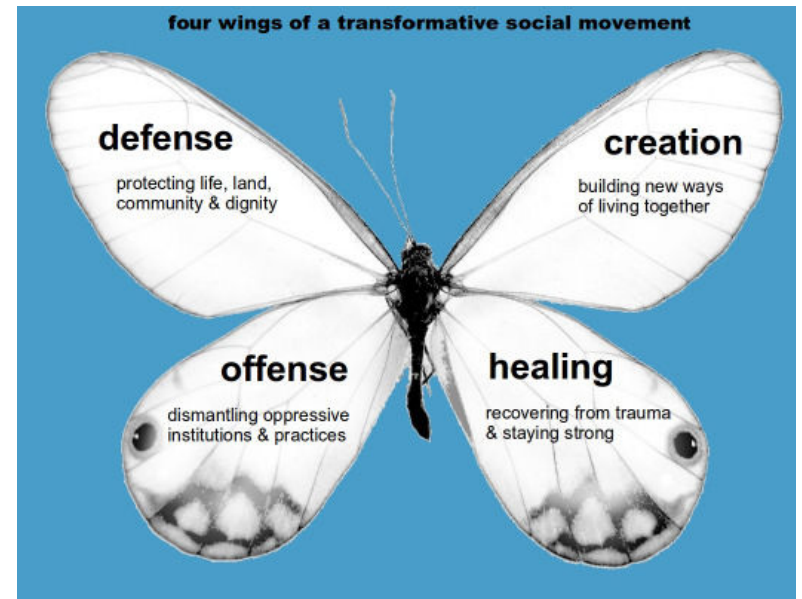
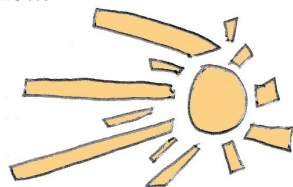
Let's be clear, though, to avoid any confusion: humans have always engaged in diverse forms of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. What the elite's self-fashioned concept of "the economy" did, in this specific historical form, was to create a kind of *conceptual enclosure* around a very particular set of human rationalities, motivations, social activities, and ways of life. Economic theory said: self-interest is *the* legitimate, and natural, economic motivation. Exclusive, individual private property is *the* legitimate, and efficient, way to organize access to resources and the means of livelihood. Accumulation of wealth (and the fear of poverty) is *the* legitimate incentive that will generate human

well-being. Wage labor (a world divided into owners and workers) is *the* way to organize effective and innovative economies. Competition is *the* dynamic that generates efficiency in production and exchange. Bundle all of these things together, publish books about their necessity and build institutions on their certainty, lock the rest of life's complexity and possibility in a closet (or a jail) and call that ... *economics*.

The physical enclosures that drove people from their common land and forced them into dependence on wage jobs over the course of a few centuries in Europe, and that robbed indigenous peoples of their lives and land, were accompanied and supported by the conceptual enclosures that made the story of "the economy." These are two sides of the same coin. And this process of double enclosure is ongoing. It is called "privatization," "colonialism," "neoliberalism," "development," and "economics 101."<sup>6</sup> The economy has to be made continually, and it is made by institutions (including the state) that enforce this story on us, that put us in debt to its dependency-machine, that steal our labor, our ideas and our futures in the name of our own best interests. It is made by convincing us that its story is true, and then punishing us when we fail to act accordingly.

We are occupying public spaces across the globe because we are sick and tired of this story, and we will no longer act "responsibly" according to its dictates: we are taking a new form of responsibility, and we are enacting a different story.

There is a vast world of possibility for how we might organize human life and livelihood that lies outside of the enclosure we call "the economy." Every single human being on the planet is already engaged in practices that cannot be contained within its cage, yet are essential to life and well-being. This is the moment in history when we can no longer ask the economists for a different version of their clever invention. This is when we break it open, let the light pour in, and begin to imagine our world anew.



We need each other's differences. We need the many different things that each of us has to offer. This is about *relentless humility*: we do not know how to make the changes that we need to make, and we will only discover the paths together.

## CREATE!

The work of occupation and connection must become the work of *creation*: the innovative, collective construction of forms of livelihood and community that might enable us to imagine a day when Wall Street can topple without bringing suffering millions with it. This is our way out of the trap. It is not a naïve notion of "dropping out" (as if everyone had the privilege to do this, or the privilege to choose otherwise), or a dreamy hope of evading hard work and struggle. It is, rather, about recognizing that the work of breaking out of our dependence is a necessary site for our creative action.

We need housing, food, water, clothing, education, healthcare, love and dignity. How will we organize to create these for ourselves? How

ues in action. These linkages offer ways for oppositional social movements to strengthen their critiques and demands with an increasing commitment to building new economies and ways of life.



And fourth, the work of *linking multiple forms of transformative work: defense, offense, creation, and healing*:

We must connect the work of defending our lives and communities from colonization and injustice, the work of actively opposing oppression in all forms, the work of healing together from trauma and hurt,<sup>20</sup> and the work of imagining and building alternative ways to live together and meet our needs as integral parts of a holistic movement for transformation. We cannot afford to divide ourselves along these lines, and we must cease to participate in a culture of activism which tries to place final judgments on the importance, effectiveness, or “radicalness” of our diverse forms of work. We need each other.

## Five Principles For Rethinking the Economy

The glimmers of a new economic story are emerging. These are concepts and intuitions that can help us to free our imaginations from the grip of the old “economy” and to embark on new collective explorations of how we might live together in this coming age of uncertainty and change. Let’s start with five principles for re-orienting our economic thinking that can help us to move: (1) from a singular notion of “the economy” to a notion of diverse forms of livelihood; (2) from an economy/nature divide to a restorative concept of ecological community; (3) from a stale choice between “the market” and “the state” to a creative political space *within and beyond* these institutions; (4) from the limiting logics of “economic laws” to the work of *creating new possibilities* through collective imagination and action; and, finally, (5) from the economics of the “experts” to *economics as a practice of democratic organizing* in which “we the people” make our own economies.

### 1. From “The Economy” to Diverse Livelihoods

*There is no single “economy,” except as a story that is enforced by institutions to maintain the status quo. There are, instead, diverse forms of livelihood, multiple ways that we make our livings in relation to each other and to the living world of which we are a part.*

The idea of a single “economic system” made of money and markets is a bankrupt story that serves only to make our economic possibilities invisible. In the *real* world—outside of the textbooks and the institutions who model the world on their ideas—we meet our needs through *all kinds* of different practices and relationships. It is time to move from a notion of “economy” to one of *livelihood*. This is not, any longer, about what the capitalist market demands of us. This is about how we make our living. How we make our *lives*.<sup>7</sup>

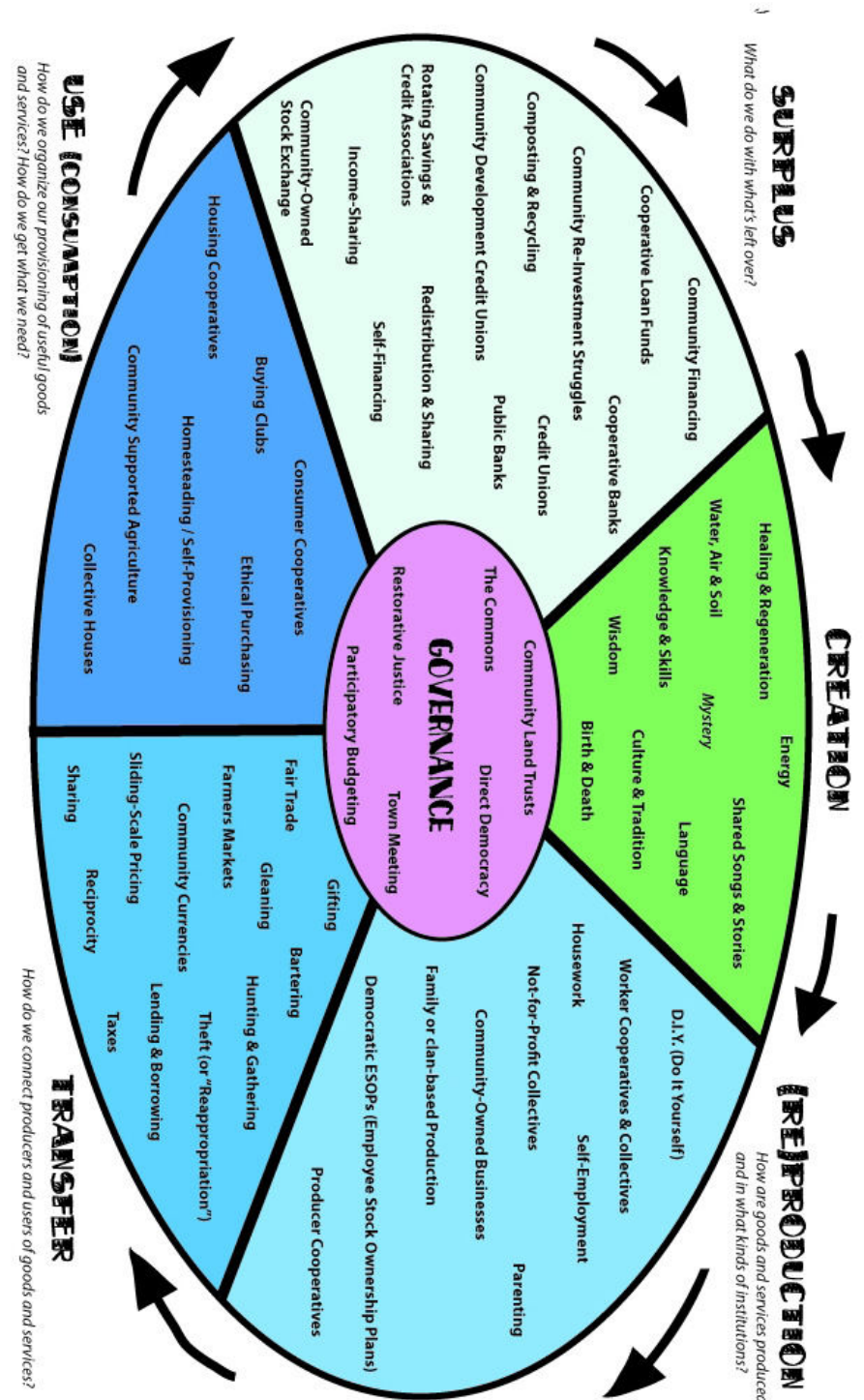
We are not just rational self-interest maximizers. We cooperate, we share, we identify with each other and create communities of care and support. Far from living in a world of cold business transactions, most

of us live in worlds that are full of complex relationships, obligations, commitments, and forms of love. We fight tooth and nail to hold onto these spaces—the roots of our dignity—in the face of an economy that tries to rob them from us.

We do not just depend on jobs and money for our livelihoods. Our lives are more than our work, and our work is more than our jobs. We depend on each other, on our families and friends, on our neighbors and on the many communities of which we are a part. We depend on gift-giving and bartering, generosity and solidarity, lending and borrowing, sharing and holding resources in common. We depend on our own skills and the skills of others, on shared wisdom, and on shared forms of work within and beyond the workplace. These are the forms of livelihood, in fact, that keep us alive in the most difficult times. We don't rely on "the market" to provide us with our needs when the floodwaters rise, when the mill closes down, when the company downsizes, or when the hurricane strikes. We rely on each other, because we *are* the economy of life and community.

In a larger sense, we also rely on the ongoing labor of other living beings and the world itself, processes of livelihood which "the economy" cannot provide (and most often works to exploit or destroy): the plants that make our oxygen, the soils that grow our food, the insects that pollinate our fruit, the climate that turns our seasons, the clouds that bring the rain, and the wind that sweeps them away to reveal the sun. This is not "natural capital": this is our shared world. It cannot be turned into money.

Neither money nor "economic growth" are the sole measures of our well-being. Even as we struggle and strive to earn it, we do not all believe in the idea that money actually measures "value." We have *other* values, too: our health, our time to rest, play and to be free, our creative expressions, our spiritual and religious lives, our family commitments, our relations with the more-than-human living world, our traditions and our stories, and the possibility of a future for those yet to come. These values do not die, no matter how many times the economists ignore them and the insurance companies try to quantify them for profit: they make us who we are, we live them, and we pass them on.<sup>8</sup>



system or conspiracy (this would cover over both the complexity of how it all connects, and the fact that power is never *that* coherent—let’s not give them too much credit, here!). Rather, we are engaging in the work of learning to hear each other’s stories, to connect with each other’s differences, to take responsibility for our own complicities, and to build solidarity across many kinds of work and struggle.

Second, *linking our many practices and institutions of cooperative livelihood together in webs of mutual support:*

This is the task of the emerging solidarity economics movement. Here, our work is to begin building concrete, material relationships of support and exchange among initiatives working in multiple sectors of economic life: projects that are caring for and defending **creation** (the gifts of the earth: all that from which we draw our livelihoods, but which exceeds human agency); forms of **production**; types of **exchange and distribution**; forms of organized **consumption**; structures for saving and allocating **surplus** (recycling and financing); and practices of democratic economic **governance** (decision-making, rules and agreements). We need to connect diverse initiatives engaging in these forms of work in order to build new, synergistic ecosystems of livelihood, to pool resources and create shared support structures, and to build collective and organized economic power.<sup>19</sup>

Third, *connecting the work of solidarity-based economic organizing with the broader work of building diverse, multi-issue social movements:*

We must integrate *economic alternatives into social movements, and social movements into economic alternatives*. Precisely what the #Occupy Movement is enacting so well. Social movements must become the lifeblood that flows through the veins of newly-connected forms of livelihood. They are the base which sustains these projects, and at the same time the base which these projects are able to increasingly sustain. Organizations working for economic, social and ecological justice can act as sources of accountability for emerging solidarity economy networks that face cultural and economic pressure to adopt “market values.” And reciprocally, solidarity economy networks can infuse social movements with concrete examples and experiences of their val-

The story of “the economy” has hidden from us our possibilities. These are not just imagined, not just fantasies of what might yet be. No: the creative action of generations of economic pioneers has already given rise to a whole array of living possibilities in which we might participate, or on which we might come to depend: worker, consumer and producer cooperatives; community currencies; fair trade initiatives; housing cooperatives and intentional communities; volunteer rescue and fire



*The Iceberg of “Diverse Economies”<sup>9</sup>*

squads; collective childcare and education networks; community-run social centers; public libraries; non-profit community development credit unions; free schools; cooperative forms of no-interest financing; community gardens; neighborhood care networks; open source free software projects; community supported agriculture (CSA) programs; farmer's markets; community land trusts— commons of all sizes and shapes.<sup>10</sup>

These are not utopian projects. They are the imperfect shapes of our creative struggles to build different forms of livelihood in this actual world. They call us toward possibilities that we have only begun to explore and to fight for.

## 2. From Economy/Nature to a Community of Life

*“The economy” is not a subset of ecology, and “nature” is neither a limit nor a source for an “economic system.” We are fully members of a community of life on this planet.*

How many more times will we be asked to choose between “jobs” and “the environment”? This choice is the insult added to the injury of enclosure. It is a demand that we choose between two forms of slow death: to starve our families one by one or to destroy the earthly base on which our lives depend.

Yet this is not an inevitable struggle between competing goods. It is a violent *effect* of the very concept of “the economy” as it has been historically constructed and justified. The process of conceptual enclosure that created the economy also created an *ecology*. Think of it this way: when you draw a square, you create not only an *inside*, but also an *outside*. Inside the economy are all the things that count. Outside the economy is everything else, including “nature,” the living world from which all livelihoods are made.

It is a convenient separation: as long as “nature” is seen as a separate domain of life, a realm of valueless objects, a pool of resources to be mined (and made “valuable”) or an empty space into which all waste

convergence, conversation and common creation. And then let's go further: inspired by those who have occupied their foreclosed homes and refused to let them go; inspired by those who reclaim un-used lots and abandoned building and transform them into new spaces of community; inspired by workers in Argentina who occupied their factories and called them their own (shouting, in words that have kindled our imaginations, “occupy! produce! resist!”); inspired by the landless workers movements in Brazil and elsewhere who organize occupations of land, taking it back from the 1%, and create vibrant, multi-generational cooperative communities. Let us begin to imagine all of the ways that we can construct new *commons*, shared spaces and pools of resources, on which we can begin to build different kinds of livelihoods.

## CONNECT!

We are only as strong as our connections with others, and the work of building other forms of livelihood cannot be done alone. Remember “the trap”: our creative escape, if it is to *work*, has to be collective. We will do it together, or we will not do it at all.

Our occupations, then, must be about making connections at every step.

First, *linking our work across multiple communities, struggles and issues:*

We are already building relationships of solidarity between people struggling against Wall Street financiers, predatory lending, corporate personhood, military action, the prison-industrial complex, the many faces of racism, the ongoing colonization of indigenous land and culture, climate change, the ecological devastation of industrial and factory farming, islands of plastic collecting in our oceans, toxic waste in low-income communities, privatization and slashing of social programs, decaying public infrastructure, and skyrocketing foreclosure and unemployment. We need to support each other in deepening and strengthening this work as much as we can, and at every turn.

This is *not* about creating a single image of “The Man” that unifies all experiences of exploitation and oppression together into one giant, coherent

So: we can begin by mapping and strengthening our current public #occupations. These are, indeed, sites where other ways of living are being birthed, public laboratories and collective schools in which we are learning how to live together, how to do democracy, how to transform ourselves, and how to enact livelihoods—real *occupations!*—without the economy of Wall Street. The many hundreds of #occupations holding spaces around the U.S. and the world are opportunities for us to experiment with and to demonstrate the kinds of relationships and institutions we seek to create. Imagine: in place of coercive jobs that we begrudge or even hate, working groups based on affinity and organized collectively; in place of isolated meals (or lack thereof), community kitchens where we share food together; in place of corporate media, forms of information-sharing that we create and control; community self-management at every turn. What can these structures evolve into? What might it look like to link them *across #occupations*, creating or strengthening regional, national and international networks of popular education, democratic practice, media, healthcare, food distribution, mediation and alternative economic imagination?

And let's map our other, wider, "occupations," too. Where are the spaces in our communities in which people are actively constructing relationships and institutions of cooperation, mutual-care, solidarity and democracy? Let us map the #occupation support groups, the grassroots neighborhood associations, the community centers, the economic and social justice organizations, the land-care and ecological defense groups, the housing cooperatives, the community gardens and farms, the worker-owned businesses, the farmer's markets, the mutual-aid support groups, the community-based nonprofits, the credit unions, the grassroots foundations, the artist collectives, the free schools, the community currency and barter networks, the public squats, the informal spaces of sharing and collaboration, the community-based health centers, the land trusts, the public parks and libraries, and every other space or structure we can possibly find. These are our roots. These are our *commons*. This is the ground from where we begin.

From here, we can begin to envision and create *new* occupations: Reclaim more and more public spaces and open them for community,

can be dumped, then "the economy" can just get along with its business of exploiting everything in the name of profit and growth. Even more convenient is the way that certain humans, along with their cultures, communities and homelands, can be tossed into the realm of nature (as "savages" or "primitive peoples") and then colonized or destroyed in the name of necessary economic development. Economics is for real humans, we are told; ecology is for everyone else.

But we rise up and resist. Mass social mobilizations, protests, strikes and occupations: we refuse to be ignored or exploited. Ecosystems, too, reach their limits and cease to be silent. Large-scale extinctions, fishery collapses, new emerging diseases, mass deforestation, devastating droughts and floods, soil nutrient depletions, rising food insecurity, and ever-increasing rates of cancer are all ways in which we are learning that no economy can get away for long with the systematic plunder of its own base. And perhaps no message could be clearer than the dawning collective realization that the spewing emissions of our economic monster are—as we speak—destabilizing the 10,000 year-old planetary climate pattern which has made agriculturally-based civilization possible.

There can be no doubt: the extent to which "jobs" appear at odds with "the environment" is precisely the extent to which we are trapped by the economic institutions of the status quo. We must make a creative and collective escape from this disastrous trap as if our lives depended on it. Because, in fact, they do.

Yes, (anticipating the economists) there are always "tradeoffs." But these can no longer be posed as tradeoffs between an "economic system" that supports humans and an "ecological system" that supports life on earth. This is the logic that seeks to make exploitation and domination efficient and "sustainable." This is the logic that hopes to fix "the economy" so that business as usual can proceed, only in "green" form. This is the economic politics in which exploitative factories cranking out millions of toxic solar panels and corporate investors bulldozing fragile mountain habitats to build wind towers forms the limits of our imagination and creative action.

We face tradeoffs not between economy and ecology, or between human livelihoods and “the environment,” but between different *ways of living* with each other and with our shared earth. Some ways of living systematically exploit and undermine the health of the people and landscapes they depend on. Others open up possibilities for relationships of solidarity and care, ways of living built on the recognition of our interdependence, on the cultivation of democratic politics, and on the making-visible of the effects of our choices. Economics must become the negotiation of livelihoods with those on whom we depend.

A new politics of ecological livelihood is calling us: to collectively refuse either form of slow death; to directly confront not the question of “jobs or environment,” but the *absurd structure of the trap itself*. This, then, is the work of *defending* our livelihoods and our ecological communities while, at the same time, *imagining and building* forms of life in which our economies and ecologies are no longer placed in opposition.

How do we do this? We are only beginning to explore the possibilities, but we can catch glimmers of emerging pathways: first, a collective refusal to accept the old choices, a defiant opposition to ecological destruction, and an emerging awareness that *no economics can be taken seriously that does not place the work of ecological restoration at the very center of its theories and practices*. Second, an emerging dedication to transforming our own needs and aspirations. We are learning that we—not just individually, but as communities— must come to *want* different lives, to make these lives possible for each other, and to find joy in these different ways of living. And finally, the ongoing invention of new forms of production and provision: zero-waste, closed-loop manufacturing, bioregional re-localization of industry, principles of “permaculture” applied to broader economic processes,<sup>11</sup> forms of decentralized and distributed community-controlled production, ecological design through biomimicry, the defense and reclamation of local and indigenous livelihood practice and knowledge, the re-construction of shared and protected resource commons.<sup>12</sup>

## OCCUPY!

What is it “to occupy”? What is this charged word that is spreading like wildfire and inciting us to reclaim public space? It reminds some of us of invasion, colonization—as in “an occupied nation.” At the same time, the #Occupy Movement is pointing toward a different sense of the word: something more like a *taking back*, a holding of space in order to open it up toward new collective possibilities. From its Latin roots, “to occupy” can, in fact, mean to *seize a space against the status quo and to turn it towards something new*. To occupy is to construct a space in which we can engage in the craft—the *occupation*—of enacting the world we long for.<sup>18</sup>

We need to understand and to enact “occupation” in the widest sense possible: to seize every single space that we can, physical and conceptual, in which to exercise collective power and experiment with new forms of collective life. Occupy everything! This is also about making visible the spaces that we have *already* occupied, the practices and forms of life in which we are already rooted and which we already share in common. Think of us as water; think of our spaces of occupation as the cracks into which we flow. These are footholds from which we launch each new moment of creative action.



The brilliance of #OccupyWallStreet is to create a common public space that is more than protest—as much a space of creation as it is of opposition. And this is what our emerging movements must be: not just protest movements, not movements clamoring only for our demands to be met, but movements actively working to build the world that we wish to live in. Nobody will do this for us, and nor would we want them to.



## 5. From “The Economy” to Economic Organizing

*We must no longer think of economics as the objective analysis of a “system.” It must now become an active practice of solidarity and democratic, grassroots organizing.*

“The economy” is something that is built *for* us. Livelihoods are what we, collectively, make for *ourselves*. We must cease to see economics as the study of a “system” that stands apart from us, and that we can influence only by demanding regulations from politicians or accountability from corporations. We must begin to see economics as something that we *do*, and the economy as that which *we make*. To the extent that this power of making our own livings has been taken from us, we are taking it back.

Our social movements must begin to make a tremendous shift. We have protested, we have expressed our outrage, we have demanded changes, we have struggled to win. But we have not yet begun, in a serious, strategic and connected way, to *build our own economies*. This is the power that we handed over to the experts and the policy-makers, and this is the power that we must reclaim: if we want to live in a just, democratic and ecologically-viable world, we need to organize ourselves, organize our resources, organize our collective power, and build this world in the here-and-now.

No waiting for a better president. No waiting for the “recovery.” No waiting for the revolution. Just the hard, slow, but powerful work of reclaiming commons, learning how to make democracy work in our lives and organizations, constructing new forms of shared livelihood, connecting them together in webs of mutual support and recognition, and fighting to overcome or transform every obstacle that gets in our way.

This is the call: Occupy! Connect! Create!

## 3. Beyond “The Market” and “The State”

*There is a world of possibility beyond “the market” and “the state,” and our economic politics must stop see-sawing back and forth between these two poles. We must work, instead, to cultivate forms of livelihood and governance that embody our aspirations for justice, democracy and solidarity.*

More market! More state! More market! More state! Is this not the repetitive debate of mainstream economic politics over the last dozen decades? The see-saw goes up and down, the liberals and the conservatives posture with their latest pet economic theories, and the business-as-usual of exploitation and world-eating continues on. Have we had enough of this yet?

We can find one source of this ridiculous game in most economics 101 textbooks. There are only two ways to organize an economy, they say: the “free market” or the “command economy.” Market or state. Capitalism or communism. Yep, that’s it.

Who gave *these* people a PhD? (Oh, right. I almost forgot. The same elite institutions that produce most of the world’s ruling 1%).

It is crucial for us to recognize that our imaginations and our economic possibilities are stifled by this radically oversimplified way of thinking. Those in power don’t mind, of course, since either option ends up with a similar result: a tiny portion of the population controlling, managing and benefiting from a vast majority of its resources. This is built into our historically-inherited story of “the economy” itself. In its representation as a huge, unified system of commodity production and financial ac-



cumulation, the two options for maintaining coherence are starkly clear. Either order emerges magically from the self-organizing dynamics of a “free” competitive market, or order is imposed from a centralized point of command. And so the market and the modern state emerge together, twins separated at birth.

One effect of this story is to make “markets” seem inevitably linked with “capitalism.” The term “capitalist market” ends up seeming redundant, and to be for (or against) one is to be for (or against) the other. This is the convenient link that allows the story of capitalism to swallow the entire domain of decentralized coordination between free agents. This is the link that makes every form of economic organization other than capitalism (and its double, the command-economy) *invisible*.

But this is the link that we have to break. Capitalism is a specific way of organizing production: a separation of working people from our abilities to meet our own needs, and a relation of wage-labor in which workers have neither ownership nor control over the profits we create. Markets are a form of exchange in which sellers and buyers meet to trade products using some agreed-upon medium of exchange.<sup>13</sup> Capitalism requires markets, but *markets do not require capitalism*.

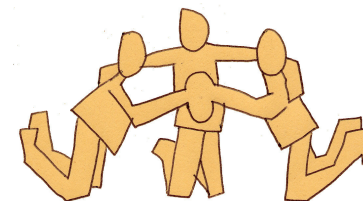
This does not at all imply an endorsement of “alternative” markets as a grand and equitable solution to our economic struggles. It is simply to say that *we do not yet know what kinds of markets we can create*. Markets are animated by all kinds of dynamics, depending on the institutions that participate in them and the rules that are set up to structure them. What kinds of “solidarity markets” might emerge from a network of exchange among worker- and community-owned businesses? Among businesses structured to meet the needs of their members and not to maximize profits? In a culture in which the love of “markets” runs deep, and in which this love can be seen as an expression of the desire for legitimate freedom, we must take these questions seriously. What would it look like to sever capitalism from markets in our public politics? We can meet the pro-marketeters not with another demand for state control, but with a *challenge*: let’s take the ethics of democracy and freedom all the way into the heart of the exploitative capitalist firm. Let’s transform *that*, and then see what forms of freedom we can make together.

forbidden; certain things are supported, and others denied. We must remember this: capitalist businesses did not spring up magically into the world *already* “viable.” The supposed practicality, efficiency and creative power of the market economy was not simply waiting, ready-to-go, for its successful release into the world. The world had to be *radically transformed* so that these institutions could become possible and viable.

Political struggle and creation cannot be simply about realizing that which is already possible, but must be about *changing the conditions of possibility themselves* so that new forms of life can be born.

This is our task: to begin envisioning and creating relationships and structures that make new ways of living and new forms of livelihood more and more viable. This is the work of making *visible*, and then *connecting*, the practices of cooperation and solidarity that already exist in our midst—the work of a *solidarity economics*. It is in part through our linkages, and the strength that we gain from mutual aid and collective action, that the conditions of viability begin to change. This connection creates a space of learning through which we can begin to understand what kinds of broader institutional changes might *deepen* this viability.

The question of what economic *reforms* to fight for should always be asked with this in mind: will this reform help to change the conditions of possibility for other kinds of cooperative, equitable and ecological livelihoods to gather strength? Will this open the door to new possibilities for grassroots, democratic organization? Will this help to strengthen movements that are fighting to take back commons, build collective power and enact new ways of living?



creativity, imagination and experimentation. This is not to say that everything is possible—it is not—but simply that *we do not yet know where the line is between the possible and the impossible*, and stories that stop us from exploring this frontier are stories that we must leave behind.<sup>16</sup>

We stand at the crossroads of multiple converging crises. The economic institutions on which so many of us depend are collapsing; peak oil (among other key “resources”) is knocking at the door; political instability lurks in the wings; ecosystems are disintegrating; and the entire climate of the planet is becoming increasingly volatile. Nobody knows how to solve these problems, or how to mobilize humanity into a common, rapid process of reconfiguring our ways of life. This is something that the 1% and the 99% have in common: we face a terrifyingly uncertain future. There is no reasonable response but for us to experiment. As C.S. Holling says, “The only way to approach such a period in which uncertainty is high and one cannot predict what the future holds, is not to predict, but *to experiment and act inventively and exuberantly via diverse adventures in living*.”<sup>17</sup>

Experimentation means shifting from the skeptical world of “no” to the open and creative world of “let’s give it a try.” But it does not mean chasing windmills or wandering aimlessly into fluffy fields of hopeful rainbows. For many of us, experimentation is not even a choice, but a harsh reality that we face as the systems we have relied upon unravel. We experiment because we need to seek new forms of livelihood. The *question* is about how we engage with this seeking. We can cling to the hope of restoring the lost order, and we can look for scapegoats to blame for its collapse. We can go it alone or in small groups of self-seekers, grabbing whatever can be found in a world of scarcity. Or we can find and create new communities of learning in which our experimentation is collective, shared, and seeks to build something in the world that might contribute to an equitable and resilient future.

In this work, we must be clear that “viability” of our proposals and our projects cannot be determined in the terms set by the experts and managers of the current economy. Every society creates the *conditions of viability* for its own practices: certain things are permitted, and others

The other side of this coin, the side of the *state*, presents us with a similar trap we need to avoid. We have been handed an image of “the state” as a single, unified, coherent thing.<sup>14</sup> You are either *for it* or *against it*. To advocate for one function of the state is to ally yourself with all of them. The state is either the bureaucratic boogeyman working to destroy our freedom and steal our hard-earned money, or it is the singular leverage point for progressive politics, the great protector of public goods and the provider of social resources. We either work to abolish it, or to restore it to some mythic, past democratic glory.

This story narrows our political and economic possibilities by hiding two key things. First, it hides all of the complex differences that exist “inside” the big box that we call “the state.” All kinds of different and conflicting relationships, politics, interests, and functions get bundled together in this package-deal. Take taxes, for example: sometimes taxes are a form of social solidarity, a way for wealth to be fairly redistributed for the benefit of the current population and for future generations. Sometimes taxes are a form of exploitation that extracts further wealth from working people and subsidizes elite business schemes. Sometimes (though rarely) taxes are a way to finance community-based and democratically-controlled livelihood institutions (cooperatives, for example). Sometimes taxes are a way to finance the plunder and military colonization of other lands. The question is not “state or no state”; it is this: *whose values are institutionalized* in the specific programs of a specific state? Does a given element of the “state” help or hinder in forming the conditions of possibility for new forms of democratic and equitable livelihood in our communities?

But perhaps even more importantly, our oversimplified story of “the state” hides all of the possible ways that we might imagine and struggle for the *transformation* and *decentralization* of many state functions. Budgeting, service provision and the protection of public goods (among other things) might be placed *directly* in the hands of the communities that are most affected by them. What does the state need to *do*, and what does the state need to *coordinate*, but delegate to a more direct and local level? What can we remove the state from altogether, and do for ourselves?

These questions might seem terrifying if you've been thinking that the problem of "neoliberalism" is its assault on the state. But the problem of neoliberalism is, more accurately, its agenda to "privatize the benefits and socialize the costs." It is a project of social theft and *enclosure*. The state appears as its target, and as something we must absolutely defend, only because we have *conceded the entire terrain of possibility* to the old state/market divide! Might we imagine a more inspiring politics that sees the widespread public critique of the state as an *opportunity* to experiment with new forms of grassroots democratic practice? Might we learn to selectively defend and fight for certain elements of the state while remaining true to an aspiration for maximum direct democracy? Might we move from privatization to *cooperativization*?

And this points to the final problem of the state/market divide, and one that is likely clear by now: there is an *entire universe* of livelihood practices and institutional possibilities that are neither part of "the market" nor part of "the state." It is this huge space—in fact, the space in which most of us live, most of the time—that is rendered invisible when we reduce "the economy" to its old twin forms. This space has been called "the social economy," the "third sector," and "civil society." But these terms fail to capture the diversity and scope of all that we make and do outside of the market and the state: all forms of gifting, sharing, collective-doing; in fact, all forms of the *work of living itself*. Neither job nor handout: this is how we occupy our world.

What does this all mean?

It calls for an approach to livelihood that refuses to concede our imaginations to the narrow story of the market and the state, and yet also refuses to abandon these two realms as spaces of political possibility. This is part of the collective, creative escape from the trap of dependency: the need to live in the present so that a future might be possible. Our task is to identify and create sites, institutions, and practices in which values of equity, cooperation, democracy, pluralism and solidarity are enacted—in markets, in states, in any realm of life—and to *link them together*. This is the approach of a "solidarity economics," emerging from grassroots social movements around the world.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. From Necessity to Possibility

*There are no "economic laws," and there is nothing necessary or inevitable about economic dynamics. We make our economies, and therefore we can make them differently.*

Economists have been the priests of the possible. When they appear in public to address some issue or key question, it is most often to tell us (directly or implicitly) what we can or cannot do, what is or is not viable, what is reasonable and what is merely naïve dreaming. They seem to have it all figured out: direct access to sum total of human potential. Interested in social change? In imagining a more equitable and democratic future? In exploring new possibilities for how we might live together responsibly? Don't get too excited until you talk to the economists. They're the ones who sign your permission slip.

Does it sound familiar? Can you picture the hard-nosed realist, secretly resentful for all that time spent learning obscure math or business strategy while you were dreaming of a better world, snickering at your aspirations?

Well *of course* we look foolish to the mainstream economists and their apologist friends! The whole structure of their "economy" is set up to do exactly this: to narrow the field of possibility in such a way that makes certain kinds of proposals, and certain ways of life, seem non-viable, impossible, ridiculous. Even some (though not all!) of the "left" economists play this game: instead of offering their skill and creativity to help us *make viable* that which we aspire to create, they pull out the laws and logics and tell us: "no."

It's time to begin consciously and systematically ignoring anyone who claims that they have figured out what can or can't be done. As the Chinese proverb says, "Those who say it can't be done should get out of the way of those doing it." We are *finished* with the politics of economic "laws." Every such law, every such "necessary logic," every claim that some possibility is closed must be met as a suspected ploy to shut down