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**Cultivating Emancipatory Rural Politics of Possibility:
Greenhorn Imaginaries and Infrastructures**

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In late August 2015, a 100-foot schooner carried more than five tons of organic food into Boston Harbor. The nearly century-old Adventure had set sail from Portland several days prior with \$70,000 worth of cargo produced by small, sustainability-minded farmers throughout the state of Maine. Unloaded onto bicycles, the goods were transported by peddle power to be sold at the newly-restored Boston Public Market, a municipally-owned marketplace designed to promote civic life and local enterprise. This maiden journey of Maine Sail Freight brought festivities as well as food. In the weeks leading up to voyage, parades and picnics, concerts and classes, commemorated the occasion in the Pine Tree State. Upon arrival in Boston the celebrations continued: members of the local food community vended alongside their welcome maritime guests; area experts held workshops at restaurants on the history of American food provisioning and distribution; professors at an elite local university lectured on revolutionary politics and the need to reclaim the collective commons of seeds and sea. From freight box, to boat, to bike, to local businesses, the ship's bounty was sold off to eager and curious patrons in a matter of days.

Nearly two and half centuries after dissenting colonials dumped several tons of tea into that very same Boston harbor, an act which famously helped to catalyze and collectively-express the political and economic sovereignty of the nascent American imaginary, Maine Sail Freight aimed to stake a similar claim for a regional system of food production and distribution premised on alternative values of community, transparency, democracy, and social justice. Organized by the Greenhorns, a grassroots network of young farmers, in collaboration with businesses, non-profits, and municipal organizations along the North-Eastern Seaboard, Maine Sail Freight was representative of an emergent form of decentered collective action seeking economic reform, political empowerment, and environmental sustainability across the food system.

The deleterious effects of rural restructuring—environmental, economic, and political—are well documented the world over. Such transformations have inspired promising and powerful resistance such as transnational agrarian social movements aimed at securing food sovereignty (Edelman et. al 2008), but also reactionary forms of authoritarian populism in which rural citizens grip ever tighter to conservative, often exclusionary and aggressive values and politics (Scoones et al. 2018). The extraction of wealth from main street to wall street, the corporate consolidation of land, resources, and family farming, and the attempts to master nature through novel forms of techno-scientific domination are catastrophic catalysts of troubled times that demand political and scholarly attention. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that grassroots movements are emerging, some overtly oppositional, others oriented to cultivating imaginaries, infrastructures, and institutions otherwise. These potentially emancipatory efforts are important to consider. As Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro (2014) declare, to “present alternatives to declarations about what ‘is’ or imperatives about what ‘should be’ is itself a political act—a radical one...[it works] to lend the ‘otherwise’ full ontological weight so as to render it viable as a real alternative.” It is for precisely such reason that social movements have resolutely declared that “another world is possible” in the face of the neoliberal creed that “there is no alternative.” Cultivating possibility is central to inspiring and supporting nascent activist practices, lending them ontological valence as well as radical potential.

A key component of this politics of possibility is the “radical imagination.” The radical imagination, elaborated by Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) but codifying the comprehensive theoretical work of Graeber (2004, 2013), Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006), Hage (2015), and others, is “the ability to imagine the world, life and social institutions not as they are but as they might otherwise be” (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014; 3). It offers the discursive materials to construct a collective horizon of hope. But the key to the radical imagination is not simply in the act of envisioning alternative futures; it is

also in drawing those prospects back to inform and inspire political engagement in the present. Moreover, the radical imagination relies not just on utopian foresight but on rereading the past, “telling different stories about how the world came to be the way it is” (3) and in incorporating these alternative histories into a (re)vision of what is politically possible. New solidarities and identities begin to emerge alongside novel prospects of what citizens can desire, rightfully demand, and set to work developing.

In addition to radical imagination, crucial to the politics of possibility is prefigurative politics. Prefiguration suggests that means must be consistent with ends and that, in activist terms, “the organizational form that an activist group takes should embody the kind of society [they] wish to create.” (Graeber 2013; 23). In practice it often takes the form of direct democracy and consensus decision making but the important aspect of prefiguration is that citizens enact the change they wish to see in the world; actively working to co-create alternative institutions and ways of being “within the shell of the old” (Brienes 1989). For those engaged in the practice it is a tactic to achieve agency in that it does not await authorization from a separate, ostensibly higher power. Alongside radical imagination, prefigurative politics are central to activist projects seeking to enact possibilities through practices in the present.

Through an approach that considers the politics of possibility it is promising to reread many expressions of alternative food systems practices and relations as emergent, experimental forces that seek to embody (after Graeber) the kind of society they wish to create. *Food Activism: Agency, Democracy and Economy* (2014) and *Food Utopias: Reimagining Citizenship, Ethics, and Community* (2015) are two recent edited volumes that highlight this fertile approach to both activism and its academic analysis, bringing our attention to the diverse ways in which agri-business as usual is being challenged on a global scale but also offering a progressive way of thinking about these multi-valent points of resistance. As the *Food Utopias* editors note, the concept of food utopias “helps us critique (and decenter) conventional narratives, document experiments whereby food is being done differently, and emphasize that the practice of food or doing food differently is an often messy and always indeterminate process” (7). In opening new terrains of possibility and new spaces of difference, food activist projects centered on the radical imagination, prefiguration, and the politics of the possible allocate fertile ground for cultivating an alternative food system through grassroots engagement.

The analysis of food systems resistance through an activist or utopian lens is limited but emerging. Carolan (2013), for instance, traces the “wild side” of agro-food scholarship identifying a subtle but significant shift towards economic experimentation and political imagination. Harris (2009) deploys Gibson-Graham’s approach of reading for difference to a particular form of ethical consumerism—the 100 Mile Diet—to highlight openings and opportunities in alternative food network activism. Wilson (2013) explores the potential for autonomous food spaces—such as Food Not Bombs—to produce radical possibilities of mutual aid and non-market exchange beyond capitalism. Wald (2015) considers the prefigurative political strategies that buttress various food sovereignty movements. Kloppenburg (2014) rightly asks if it’s possible to “repurpose the masters tools,” exploring open-source seed initiatives and the politics of patenting. Nevertheless, there is insufficient research that considers the relationship between food *production* and the cultivation alternative utopian or activist subjectivities, and little that queries its emancipatory ideological and infrastructural potential.

With the politics of possibility in mind, in this paper bring rich empirical attention to the discourses and practices of the Greenhorns, with the aim of accomplishing two things. The first is to elaborate the process and effects of discourses oriented to hailing young farmers as agrarian activists. The interpellation of contemporary agrarian activists, working to constitute individuals as particular kinds of subjects (Juris 2012; citing Althusser 2001), unfolds through the cultivation of what I call an “ethical agrarian imaginary.” The ethical agrarian imaginary calls out for farmer-subjects to occupy an ideological space in which particular food production practices, and the social relations they engender, are rendered morally superior to the food and foodways born of modern industrial agriculture. This imaginary also brings with it a constellation of hopes and desires that motivate alternative forms of agriculture, buttress collective forms of solidarity, and sustain experimental and potentially radical

approaches to provisioning. Imagination in this sense reflects both a temporal horizon of possibility as well as a social horizon of community consciousness. These distinct senses of imagination come together in the ethical agrarian imaginary to support prefigurative economic and political forms. The emerging institutional and infrastructural forms these imaginaries inspire are the second primary focus of this paper. I ask us to consider the extent to which emerging social and collaborative forms of deliberation, production, and distribution provide greater “room to maneuver” (van der Ploeg 2008), affording autonomy from the conventional food system and its myriad deleterious effects. I suggest that such emergent systems should be considered “emancipatory” infrastructures in that they provide the ideological and material means of transcending, if not bypassing altogether, agri-business-as usual. In taking each of these topics in turn—imagination and prefiguration—I explore the potential of such grassroots activism in which individuals learn to identify, to aspire, and to redesign systems in ways that align with the emancipatory ends the movement seeks to engender.

Cultivating an Ethical Agrarian Imaginary

The Greenhorns stated goal is to “retrofit” the American food system and rebuild a vibrant alternative agricultural economy. Billing themselves as “the next generation of American farmers,” they have published several books offering practical advice for young farmers bundled in a telling polemic of agrarian ideology. I suggest that these texts offer rich insights into the activist network’s discursive tactics to inspire grassroots democratic engagement, to cultivate utopian visions of alterity, and to shape the worldview of aspiring farmers.

The constitution of young farmers *as* agrarian activists, that is, as particular kinds of farmer-subjects, proceeds through the cultivation of what I call an “ethical agrarian imaginary.” It opens new objects and subjects of politics, and frames quotidian acts in revolutionary and radical terms. It both draws upon the cultural material of the past (especially Jeffersonian agrarianism) and, as I will focus on here, directs it towards an imagined future. Consider the language:

Our stories come from experience, but they vibrate with the anticipation of a particularly good American future. Farming is an expression of patriotism and hope...we are crafting that future according to our own tastes...Imagine: we can reshape the American landscape... We can imagine already the outcome and consequences of our work together, the building and rebuilding of sustainable agriculture, economy, and society. Ultimately it’s in our hands to make it so.

Note in particular the rhetorical power of the urge to imagine. The narrative offered here conveys a future-oriented hopefulness aimed to cultivate aspiration and agency amongst young farmers. It conveys a dream for a particular version of an agrarian utopia populated by self-reliant farmer-patriots; one that can be cultivated by “working together” to rebuild “sustainable agriculture, economy, and society.” The discursive deployment of futurity is strategic in two distinct ways. For utopia is, I would argue, never conceived as a nowhere place, as the etymology of the term would suggest, but rather a not-yet place; utopian visions are operationalized as a horizon of hope to be struggled towards (see also Wright 2010). The discourse operates in contradistinction with images of dystopia, the not-yet future otherwise imminent without action.

The literature strive to reinforce a sense of alterity between the conventional agro-industrial political economy and that which the Greenhorns envision and desire. On the one hand, a future dystopia beckons if conventional agri-business as usual continues uninterrupted. As is, “our agricultural system seems like [an erosive] surging river—flowing through degraded wetlands, swollen and muddy with petrochemicals.” The extractive industries including agriculture are “a perpetual Ponzi-scheme played out against the future” (8). While the federal rural development agenda prioritizes (even subsidizes) land consolidation, suburb development, and industrial agriculture, the Greenhorns view sustainable agriculture as a form of direct action preventing these otherwise inequitable and unsustainable uses of the land—in overt confrontation to the belief that their “votes may be ignored.” “We cannot afford to

lose the land, we cannot afford to let the barn slip down, let the greenhouses lurking by the side of the road be bulldozed for a strip mall” (2015; 7).

One the other hand, Greenhorns conjure an alternative future capable of being sown through farming: “at a certain moment, this economy ends. And I think it ends first with Agriculture” (17). One almanac proposes that “the seed for a radical transformation of our economy can be found in farming and in the radical culture of farming as the resonant outcome of human agency, human values, and an accelerating dynamic shift in the expectations of our children as well as the children of those that we are feeding with our produce” (Fleming 2013; 14). Elsewhere the appeal to a utopian imagination is even more direct; “Commercial/commodity farming may dominate the landscape, but in our imaginations and mountain valleys a different dream persists, a dream wrapped up in a broad set of moral values, democratic principles” (7). In cultivating organic vegetables and heirloom grains, the Greenhorns are “crafting the future according to their own tastes” replete with “good” food and “good” food production. Moral values and democratic principles thus nourish the collective’s agrarian dreams at the same time that the laboring towards that future is said to bring that ethical agrarian imaginary into being.

In one respect, the Greenhorns’ discourse conjures a radically different future, yet it also speaks of a reclamation of a particular version of the past. The almanac format itself is a strategic homage to Ben Franklin’s early 18th century “Poor Richard Almanac,” a popular encyclopedia of proverbs and practical knowledge and one of the primary forms of entertainment and education for rural households before radio and regularly-delivered newspapers. In the introduction the editor’s note, “As amateurs, we have much to learn by studying history for precedents as we strategize our next big moves” (Fleming 2013; 16) and what’s more, “the bravery required of new farmers today requires history as a context (3). The introduction offers a truncated history of agrarian America, tracing an intellectual lineage from Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexis de Tocqueville, through the transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau, the utopian literature of the Blithedale Romantics and the Nashville Agrarians, the birth and decay of late 19th century Populist revolt, up to the present-day neo-agrarians like Wendell Berry. As aspiring agrarians, their particular emphasis on Jefferson—“our favorite farmer president”—is perhaps unsurprising. Jefferson’s claim that “cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous and the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interest by most lasting bonds” (11) is proposed in bold. They emphasize that many of “our country’s most powerful leaders were also farmers,” and suggest that “they saw the tremendous metaphorical power of agriculture in the project of America” (11). Through these discourses a sense of inherent and thoroughly American virtue is tethered to their neo-agrarian project.

In this reading of the past, the Greenhorns acknowledge yet stridently distance themselves from the unsavory aspects of agrarian history—“the development agenda, the slavery, the commodification of nature, the subjugation of women” (Fleming 2013; 13). At the same time they translate the wisdom of the founding fathers into contemporary parlance; quoting Jefferson they suggest that “ideas should freely spread from one to another over the globe, for the moral and mutual instruction of man, and improvement of his condition” but interpret it to mean an obligation to share knowledge and inventions in an “open source” manner (12). This history, they argue, is a commons, a shared legacy that “holds utopia like a carefully folded secret inside a rational approach” and what’s more, one that conveys “certain values embedded in this era of history that we can build from.” These principles aren’t hidden or marginal, they suggest, “they are the founding principles, the founding values, the first words on the documents that describe our nation state. Thomas Jefferson would chide us for giving on such a noble structure, allowing it to become corporate, bloated, and corrupt” (13).

Through this revisionist historical narrative we find the Greenhorns buttressing a foundation myth upon which to erect an alternative vision of America that, by their reckoning, holds true to core cultural values. It helps us understand the almanac’s otherwise curious dedication to “farmers and other patriots” and the rhetorical work similar appeals throughout are tailored to achieve. The Greenhorns strategic use of history and imagination is well summarized in the opening to the 2015

Almanac: “farming seems to have become a portal for deliberate, cultural and joyous retort against the terms of our civilizational phylogeny.” They continue, “In this volume, new agrarians explore alternative histories and possibilities. Tapping into a deeper, more complex past—and operating in expectation of an imaginal, but plausible, feasible, deep and tempting future” (Fleming 2015; 1).

Prefiguring the Possible

In addition to striving to cultivate a contemporary aspiration for an alternative future founded on an ostensibly virtuous past, the Greenhorns movement also works through what might be considered a prefigurative political economy. The organization models the egalitarian ends they aim to achieve by releasing educational materials freely through the commons, producing these resources in a crowd-sourced manner, and encouraging open-source technology development through their FarmHack platform, among other ways. The organization model itself enacts the change they wish to see, “this isn’t a top-down, command and control situation. There are no orders to follow, no blueprint” (6).

The prefigurative political economy is also evinced in the Greenhorns approach to co-creating alternative agricultural institutions within “the shell of the old.” In addition to claiming a genealogical heritage with American farmers, the literature also champions the rhetoric of the American pioneering spirit. For instance, it offers numerous examples of claims to “inventing new ways of doing business designed by another era” (Bradbury 2012) and suggests that young farmers “engage with the inherited values of traditional farmers...the good and the bad, toxic legacies and brilliant designs” and build upon their genetic foundation; “We have heritage genetic code in our vegetables based on older people’s tastes, storage needs, and cider preferences. We learn their values through doing, and failing, and trying again” (Fleming 2013; 14). But while it claims a shared legacy it also emphasizes alterity and distance, “We love to gossip with our old-timer neighbors, but we are not satisfied to farm in their way” (15). A generational schism and suture is at work. The Greenhorns endeavor to fashion a sense of community, solidarity, and shared identity through these boundary-making and boundary-breaking discourses as they simultaneously “other” conventional farmers who practice agriculture buttressed by different values and experiences.

Not just ideologically but infrastructurally too, the Greenhorns strive to reinvent American agriculture in the edifice of the old. One of their projects is to revitalize the National Grange hall network. Once the sites of vibrant democratic engagement, grassroots activism, and rural community building in the late 19th century, the evisceration of rural America has left these critical spaces of the public sphere largely dormant. The Greenhorns are working to animate these spaces anew with association and community spirit by hosting dances, potlucks, seed-swaps, and other recreational and community-building activities. They are working to quite literally vitalize rural America. In addition to these social capital oriented endeavors, they have also organized an oral history project called Grange Future to document the past and present activities of the Grange. Their logic in doing so is to build upon the Grange’s established history of agrarian activism as well as to reclaim that history as a commons:

We see the Granges as an appropriate vessel for futurist, family-farm oriented community action, with a strong basis in economic theory, resistance and cooperation. We hope to embolden greenhorns in our network with an entry-point into the grange movement, to unlock and revive the many grange halls currently hibernating: to use the syllabus of past actions to inform contemporary ones, and to reclaim the radical politics of the grange at the local and national levels. (Grange Future)

As with their discourses, Greenhorns practices look backward to the past to orient and promote their future-oriented project of agrarian reform. The Grange hall serves as a revealing metonym for the broader Greenhorns project of utilizing the cultural and material resources readily at hand to bring an alternative yet thoroughly-American future into being.

The Grange halls represent the shell of the old but so too does the broader agrarian landscape and agricultural economy. Speaking of the Greenhorns headquarters, Severine notes, “My little red house in this fairy tale is a relic of a previous economy—the extractive boom-days of mining lumbering, and quarrying in the Adirondacks. That economy is now imploded making this land and house accessible and affordable for redemption by sustainable agriculture” (Fleming 2015; 20). The process of restoring agriculture asks “can we harmonize our farm with the larger economy, even if the terms of that economy are unreasonable and distorted” (2013: 14), and claims that “we straddle agrarian culture and market culture, to be practical” (2013; 15). Sustainable agriculture is thus framed in a post-industrial context as redemptive and distinctly alternative to the distorted conventional agro-economy. Nevertheless it mobilizes existing resources of that “imploded” capitalist economy to fashion new social relations of production within the shell of the old.

The Maine Sail Freight (ad)venture that introduced this article is an extra-ordinary example of their political economic vision in practice. Here, the Greenhorns stated goal is to open up space for alternative provisioning by coordinating an egalitarian and socially/environmentally just parallel economy. Harkening back to an earlier era when much commodity exchange occurred by boat, the Greenhorns aim to reclaim the commons of sea and wind to engender an alternative food network liberated from fossil fuels. As they assert in a press-release that accompanied the event, “We’re hoisting our sail to celebrate the new regional economy’s many benefits, and to protest the impact on regional livelihoods caused by concentration of power and poor labor conditions, hallmarks of our current global food and trade system” (The Greenhorns 2015).

This project reconceived the conventional commodity chain from farm to fork, offering in its stead a system of distribution with a human face. More than the utility maximizing of bare rational economics, in which it would indeed be less expensive to ship goods by highway, Maine Sail Freight was conceived, in part, to build community and ideological consensus at every port down seaboard. In doing so it emphasized the importance of multiple rationalities, that there are extra-economic values worth cultivating other than the cold neoliberal calculus of financial bottom line. The diverse festivities that coupled the food provisioning—picnics and parades, concerts and classes—were at once a celebration of the regional economy and a catalyst to critical conversations about what its restructuring might in practice look like. As Severine suggested in an interview for the event “We’re infusing this dialogue with whimsy, but it’s actually pretty serious. If we can charm our way in with a sailboat, and then move on to the tough talk of intergenerational planning and intergenerational power sharing and intergenerational knowledge sharing, then let’s do it. Is the waterfront just for billionaires and their yachts? No” (“Maine Made Farm Goods”). The system of distribution is an instrumental vehicle for inspiring greater dialogue between denizens of the rural and urban, producers and consumers, and the young and old, as well as for stoking an imagination of possibilities for doing food otherwise.

But it was not only instrumental, it was also overtly prefigurative. The use of sustainable transportation methods, the mobilization of volunteer labor and affective engagement, the close collaboration between non-profits, farmers, local businesses, and area institutions emphasized that means must be consistent with ends. It worked to co-create alternative institutions within the shell of the old while at the same time opening a discursive space for imagining the world as it might otherwise be. “Any number of millionaires could probably get a boat to go from Point A to Point B,” Severine noted in an interview; “Our goal is to involve young people in creating a possible future that straddles the present and the future” (“Meet: Severine von Tscharner Fleming”). The prefigurative aspects of the project are highly-reflexive, strategically implemented to encourage widespread participation—*involving* young people—and thus affective investment, as well as to cultivate a horizon of hope. In interview she notes:

It’s all about building a new economy inside the old economy...it all seems hard but what we are doing now [citing corporate control of our food system, the international hunger crisis, our national obesity problem and the impact of climate change on land] is clearly not working...It’s obviously impossible for us to sustain this food system. As a young person, trying to fit your life

into that problematic context can be demoralizing... These are the narratives that confound us as young people and diminish our power. (“Meet: Severine von Tscharnher Fleming”)

In this insightful passage, a structure of feeling characterized by demoralization or resignation is acknowledged but undermined in the same breathe. Shifting the narrative from one that “confounds” and “diminishes our power,” she emphasizes the work of “building a new economy inside the old.” In the process, resignation gives way to utopian possibility, circulating a discourse that empowers the activist project of doing food differently.

In all, the Maine Sail Freight endeavor offers a window into the expanse of the Greenhorns activist project. In one respect it aims to facilitate regional food autonomy and to inspire an alternative imagination of production and trade, combining an experimental vision with the tactical spectacle of performance aimed at a wider audience. It also strives to buttress a food system not simply oppositional but also alternative to the existing neoliberal capitalist model. Here, as elsewhere, they ground the project in a reclaimed history, citing not only the American Revolution but also Gandhi’s famous salt protest. Civil disobedience and public protest are, by this logic, inherent to the American project and appeals to the virtuous resistance of subjugated people lend a rhetorical aura of righteousness to the organization’s dissent of the agro-industrial status-quo. It also aims to inspire courage amongst this band of “punk yeoman” as they struggle “in the face of overwhelming odds.” What from one perspective seems like irrational, recidivist luddism, from the Greenhorns vantage-point is viewed as the only ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable way forward.

Towards an Emancipatory Rural Politics of Possibility

The advocacy literature published and the cultural programming organized by the Greenhorns works to raise consciousness of both an individual and a shared agrarian identity. Individually, it cultivates a paradigm for appreciating the value(s) of sustainable agriculture. In the collective sense, it works to engender feelings of solidarity and community amongst the growing number of beginning farmers going, for the first time, “back to the land.” The discursive construction of collective consciousness buttresses emerging social movements as they seek “to uncover hidden histories of their political ancestors in order to fortify their legitimacy and forge new collective identities” (Edelman 294). The ideological and social-capital building strategies of the collective’s discourses and practices work to produce and reproduce an imagined community of young, alternative farmers. By appealing to core cultural values as represented by Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, and others and by attempting to reclaim a rural agrarian history the Greenhorns attempt to tell “a different story about how the world came to be the way it is” and incorporate that history into a (re)vision of collective solidarity and political possibility. In addition to cultivating what Haiven and Khasnabish refer to as the radical imagination—the process by which individuals and collectives envision and co-produce the future in a way that fuels social change—we also see the development of what I have here called an ethical agrarian imagination; a shared sense of solidarity and horizon of hope that accentuates virtuous aspects of rural, communal life and small-scale sustainable farming.

Geographer Julie Guthman (2008) warns that “politics must be seen dialectically, with an eye toward the openings they produce as well as the closures” (1172). She continues, “it is important to interrogate the micro-politics of various activist projects, in terms of what strategic decisions undergird them, how these strategies are operationalized and what sort of subjectivities they create” (2008; 1172). I would suggest that the Greenhorns pragmatic and discursive energies are directed at what Gibson-Graham (2006) refer to as a process of “resubjectivation”—a transformation of desires, a cultivation of new identities, and a transmission of intellectual and physical capacities. Gibson-Graham asks, “What practices of thinking and feeling, what dispositions and attitudes, what capacities can we cultivate to displace the familiar mode of being?” (2006; xxxv). It is the labor of subject making that opens up a politics of the possible where alternative futures can be imagined and desired. Through implementing prefigurative economic politics and cultivating an ethical agrarian imaginary, the Greenhorns are building collective capacity to reconstruct the social relations of food production from ground up. They are engaged in the open-ended process of cultivating themselves as different

kinds of political and economic subjects. The micro-politics of Greenhorn activist practices works to re-invent everyday provisioning in a collective and participatory manner—from farm to freight to fork.

What if we were to consider the emergence of alternative agriculture as a fertile site of becoming; cultivating not only new human/environmental relations but also new social and solidarity relations as beginning farmers slide (not without friction) into new dispositions, sentiments, and subjectivities alongside work boots and soiled overalls. Central to the idea of becoming is that acknowledging the open-ended, unfinished nature of things discloses hope and possibility. As Ben Anderson (2006) proposes, “the presence of hope has long been thought to herald a more-to-come, and excessive overspilling of life, that draw bodies into an intensified connection with an...horizon because being and becoming hopeful embody a ‘radical refusal to reckon possibilities’ (742). Hope becomes an affective relation to a horizon promising more-to-come. Anderson suggests that “being political *affectively* must therefore involve building a protest against the affectivities of suffering into a set of techniques that also aim to cultivate ‘good encounters’ and anticipate ‘something better’” (749). To anticipate something better is to imbue collective action with an affect that “expands the political field because it introduces awareness of endless possibilities in every moment and brings attention to practices that might capture some of these possibilities to create change” (Roelvink 2010; 112).

As anthropologist David Nugent (2012) recounts of early Occupy ambitions, cultivating particular affective sensitivities to the prospects of change is vital to establishing “The temporal horizon...[as] the future, which is seen as offering hope, promise, possibility.” He continues, “the social-political terrain of that imagined future has yet to be defined. It can be glimpsed, however, in groups and processes that are located beyond what is—beyond the state and established parties, in the emergent organizations being prefigured, invented, and evolved by Occupy itself” (281). The new moral imaginaries emphasized by Occupy are neither new nor unique to that specific movement, informing Greenhorn activist visions oriented to the actualization of ethical practices, political subjectivities, and new social relations of food production as well. But whereas Nugent identifies in Occupy a radical sense of rupture, a discursive break with the past towards the new and unprecedented, the Greenhorns project is firmly rooted in agrarian history. Hope and imagination are thus situated in a present that extends temporally both backwards and forwards; positioned within a “temporal ontology that not only understands justice (or injustice) to be attached to the past but also understands it as (hopeful) emergence, as open possibility” (Rethmann 2013; 235). As Rethmann (2013) argues “hope has not only a history but also a horizon” (235).

It is important to note that attention to hope, possibility, and becoming is significant for not only activists but academics as well. In one respect, as Joel Robbins has urged, it helps turn attention away from a debilitating, and resignation-inducing structures of feeling that attend emphases on suffering or harm. In his call for an “anthropology of the good,” Robbins suggests that “there are lots of places where people live their personal and collective lives...pitched forward toward what they take to be a better world...an anthropology of the good can [help us] do justice to the different ways people live for the good, and [find] ways to let their efforts inform our own” (459). Likewise, attention to the good affords anthropologists the opportunity to imagine “political possibility in an age of late liberalism and cynical reason” (Rethmann 2013) and to generate a “new radical imaginary that comes from outside the existing space of conventional political possibilities” (Hage 2012; 294). For as Gibson-Graham (2006) propose, “what if we believed...that the goal of theory were not only to extend or deepen knowledge by confirming what we already know—that the world is full of cruelty, misery, and loss, a place of domination and systemic oppression? What if we asked theory to do something else—to help us see openings, to help us find happiness, to provide a space of freedom and possibility?” (7). Academic analysis of lives pitched forward towards better worlds and sensitive to openings as well as closures would respond to Ferguson’s (2010) poignant rebuke of the “politics of the antis” as being (too) often oppositional and (too) rarely for (167). In this way theory can itself be generative of becomings, open the possibility of imagining worlds otherwise, and sustain the hope that desires on the horizon are attainable and worth laboring towards.

The politics of possibility notwithstanding, the prospects of alternative agriculture to open up and actively cultivate new spaces of possibility, to vitalize the public sphere, and to inspire community building and civic engagement remains a challenge. The degree to which it might be legitimately emancipatory, and in what specific ways, remains open question. What is clear is that a segment of young Americans are not only beginning to take renewed interest in agriculture as a viable way of making a living and making life but also that their interest might have real impacts on the ecological sustainability of agriculture, the vitality of rural communities, and the access and availability of nutritious food. Equipped with energy and cultural capital, these individuals are complicating the prominent narrative of rural exodus that has been unfolding in earnest since the second quarter of the twentieth century and building new infrastructures of production and provisioning that may transform food systems in more progressive directions. Academics and activists alike would do well to continue to attend to what politics alternative agriculture opens up and encloses and to the structural and subjective transformations it encourages and otherwise elides.

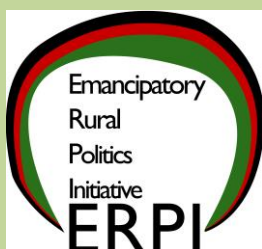
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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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