Learning to Be Affected at the IDEAL Society Ecovillage: An Embodied Education for a Posthumanist Economic World

Geographical Tripos Part II Undergraduate Dissertation

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Statement

This Part II undergraduate dissertation is my own unaided work. It is not less than 8,000 words and no longer than 10,000 words. I have received a total of 3 hours of supervision time from Mia Gray across Part IB and Part II. I also received feedback during a dissertation presentation session in January 2021.

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Cover Photo: The IDEAL Society main yurt. Used with permission from the IDEAL Society in British Columbia, Canada.
Abstract

Through the lens of the Diverse Economies literature, this dissertation investigates the diverse more-than-capitalist economic practices, ontologies, and educational systems of the IDEAL Society ecovillage in British Columbia, Canada. As we head towards environmental and climate crisis, it is becoming increasingly clear that the capitalist mode of production is failing to adequately protect both people and the environment. The ontologies underpinning the capitalist economy render the more-than-human world as a passive resource for humans to exploit - it calls for new ways of thinking that rework the relationship between economy and ecology, so that we can produce economic actors who choose to perform a fairer, more sustainable economic world. Cultivating more ethical economic subjects relies upon interrupting capitalist identities and instilling ontologies that create a moral imperative for us to act in the interests of the nonhuman world as well as our own. The ecovillage model is a prominent way in which groups are trying to develop a radically new economic ethics. People around the world are generating alternative lifestyles based upon revising the human relationship with interdependent ecosystems through communal living and emotional development. Here, I examine the ways in which the IDEAL Society’s educational model makes use of affective encounters to cultivate and to instil such an ethics. Engaging with Latour’s (2004) concept of ‘learning to be affected’, this dissertation uses visual methods as well as interviews and textual material to investigate the opportunities and encounters afforded by this model to be affected and transformed. After first tracing the performance of the economy of the IDEAL Society, I analyse the modes of engagement with the environment that its members are actively constructing, before uncovering the affective and somatic experiences through which these are maintained and taught to others. Although it is unclear whether the ecovillage itself is capable of long-lasting, performative change outside of its boundaries, in amplifying the potential of its practices, this work supports an urgent call for transformative research so that such groups can help guide towards a solution for a more ethical, sustainable economic world in the future.
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1–Introduction

“We perceive our mission to be of a humanitarian nature.’

(IDEAL Society, 2021a)

The capitalist mode of economic organisation is failing to equitably benefit both people and environments (Healy, 2015) and, with ensuing global environmental crises, scholars are renewing calls to see past post-enlightenment, techno-normative thinking and rework our relationship with the earth (Plumwood, 2007). The Institute for the Development in Education, Arts and Leisure (49°21’21.4”N 115°17’55.1”W) – the IDEAL Society – is a direct response. It is an intentional community ecovillage and UN-registered non-governmental organisation (NGO), 1.5 km south of Jaffray in British Columbia, Canada (Figure 1). It forms part of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) of around 10,000 intentional communities (Global Ecovillage Network, 2021). Formed in 1993 and home to around 35 permanent and semi-permanent residents, its 360-acre property in the heart of the Canadian Rockies forms the backdrop for a unique, experimental mode of collective life.

Guided by Christian and spiritual values that stress holism and ecological interdependence through the messages of its founder, the IDEAL Society is developing an economic ethics that diverges drastically from the capitalist norm. The ecovillage offers a radical view on what might constitute an economy (Litfin, 2009; Price et al., 2020) – it is a grassroots, community-based ideological space for experimental forms of production and consumption (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Boyer, 2015). Through practices such as permaculture, community agriculture, income pooling, communal living and intense localism, the IDEAL Society seeks to develop entirely new ontologies to the modernist thought dominant in global capitalist society. These redefine the relationship between humans and the earth, and therefore nurture vastly different economic identities.

It further looks to promote a vision outwards and to create an educational framework that fosters more ecologically and ethically conscious individuals. The IDEAL Society seeks to cultivate values and virtues within humanity as a whole, foregrounding somatic experience and affective encounters in order to generate this change. Its teachings provide hope for what a fairer, more equal, and less ecologically destructive economy might look like, and how we can activate economic subjects that choose to create one.

This dissertation, through the lens of the Diverse Economies framework (e.g. Gibson-Graham, 1996; 2006) and emerging ideas relating to embodiment, affect, and ecological ethics, investigates this potential through a discussion of the more-than-capitalist forms of economy being performed in this ecovillage, as well as the new economic ethics and ontologies that are emerging within it, and the mechanisms through which these are developed and instilled within others. Based on a two-month period of online research, it seeks to understand the extent to which the IDEAL Society (and the ecovillage model) provides an example of how affective and
embodied means can be successfully deployed to navigate the Anthropocene and create a better economic world. It makes the argument that the educational model of the ecovillage is the sort of radical intervention into social, political, and economic life that must be highlighted in geographical research as part of nurturing a more sustainable relationship between humans and nonhuman others.

*Figure 1. Map showing the location and surrounding features of the IDEAL Society study area in British Columbia, Canada.*
2–Literature Review

This work explicitly situates itself within the *Diverse Economies* (henceforth DE) literature stemming from the work of Gibson-Graham (e.g. 1996; 2006). In particular, it seeks to expand upon the conceptual developments emerging from a nascent strand of novel – but empirically underdeveloped – ideas relating to ecological ethics and theories of affect in exploring the ecovillage as a source of new economic subjectivities.

2.1 Diverse Economies and Economic Performativity

The DE research program is a radical, ethical intervention into economic geography: a ‘performat ive ontological project’ that aims to reframe hidden and alternative economic activities as credible sources of policy and activism (Gibson-Graham, 2008). It frames the hegemony of capitalism as *discursive* – that is, ‘the’ capitalist economy is the effect of ‘capitalocentric’ economic discourse and metrics, rather than an overarching system operating by immutable laws (Gibson-Graham, 1996). Scholars resist dominant discourses that take capitalism to be the underlying essence of the economy, instead arguing that capitalism has no precise ontological referent or coherent identity, thus opening up space for new languages of economic diversity and possibility (Gibson-Graham, 1996; Castree, 2004; Healy, 2009). Seeing ontology not as the ground of knowledge, but an *effect*, creates an opening whereby moral choices can bring new, more ethical economies into existence through research and disrupt the accepted ‘is’ of capitalism: a process of ‘ontological reframing’ (Mitchell, 2002; Gibson-Graham, 2008). More-than-capitalist (Henderson, 2013) economies are therefore conceptualised in terms of their different (non-)market transactions, labour processes, and organisations, within households, community organisations, co-operatives, and many others (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

DE takes up diverse geographical concepts, including performativity (Butler, 1990) and the assemblage (e.g. Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) to inject the possibility of economic change. Much like gender, the economy is performatively constituted, becoming concretely identifiable only when certain practices produce it as an ontological ‘effect’, when they are performed by adherents to its constitutive discourses (Callon, 2007; Butler, 2010). This suggests that we should engage with both the immaterial *and* the material assemblages that perform diverse economies (St Martin et al., 2015). The assemblage sees that daily economic life is constantly in production (McCann and Ward, 2011) and ‘a process of emergence, process and stabilisation’ (McFarlane, 2009: p.561). It pushes us to trace discernible processes and editable mechanisms instead of rules, structures, and external forces beyond reach, giving scholars space to illuminate performances of more ethical economic assemblages (Mitchell, 2008; Callon, 2015). These concepts emphasise that the economy is contingently (and not deterministically) configured; that it is the product of the decisions we make and the ontologies and identities to which we adhere (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). The result is that the human economic actor is repositioned as an agent of economic change and a theoretical entry point for more ethical economies (St Martin et al., 2015).
2.2 An Economic Ethics for the Anthropocene

Scholars have long argued that Western thought has constructed the world out of a dialectical nature-society relationship (e.g. Latour, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1999), rendering the nonhuman world the inert object of human intervention (Cameron et al., 2011). The discursive naturalisation of the capitalist economy as a distinctly human sphere externalises the nonhuman world and erases our complex entanglements with it - as Gibson and Miller (2015: pp.8-9) contend, ‘the history of economic thought [is] a discursive enclosure of ecological space’, which draws boundaries around ‘a particular configuration of ecological relationships between certain humans and a world made into resources for their instrumental use’.

This hyper-separation has, as some argue, has driven the emergence of the Anthropocene: an era in which humans are a geological agent, forcing planetary systems out of stability and creating unprecedented, perhaps irreversible environmental change (e.g. Dumanoski, 2009; Folke et al., 2010; Steffen et al., 2015; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). Its arrival calls for economic geographers to find new ways of thinking and producing knowledge (Gibson et al., 2015a) – it is ‘a break point for ... radically reimagining what it means to be human’ (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015: p.510) and for a thorough reworking of our fundamental ontologies (Rose et al., 2012).

To this end, DE engages with ideas from *posthumanism*: a diverse ontological project that emphasises the ‘embeddedness of the human animal with the world’ (Wolfe, 2010; Whatmore, 2013: p.34) and acknowledges that ‘humans are always in composition with nonhumanity’ (Bennett, 2004: p.365). Although already implicitly posthuman through the assemblage, the imminence of environmental crisis prompted Roelvink and Gibson-Graham (2009) to retheorise the economy explicitly in a more-than-human way. The posthuman economy displaces the human as the sole actor, situating it instead within networks of relations and other nonhuman agents, foregrounding a materialist and relational ontology that draws attention to corporeality, embodiment, and co-evolution with the more-than-human world (Roelvink, 2015). Simultaneously, it allows us to attend to embodied economic life with greater specificity, recontextualising our perceptual modes and affective states ‘in terms of the entire sensorium of other living beings’ (Roelvink and Zolkos, 2015: p.48). The embodied economic actor acts *within* the world and not upon it (Ingold, 2000). Economy as the performative outcome of a collective of interdependencies is what – in a radical intervention - allows scholars to consider nonhumans such as ginger (Gibson et al., 2015a) and rivers (Weir, 2008) as moral entities in their own right.

Gibson et al. (2015b) offer two main strategies for thinking in these terms: (1) ‘rethinking being’ and seeing a human ‘we’ embedded within interrelationships and multispecies communities, as there is no human ‘economy’ separate from ecology; and (2) ‘redefining economy’ as the process through which each and all (non)humans constitute *livelihoods*, rather than participating in a unified system. Using these ideas, economic analysis becomes a conceptual frame through which research itself may become a process of co-transformation and learning that reconstitutes the world and involves a web of human and nonhuman actants (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009).
2.3 Resubjectivation and the Body

The economy rethought as posthumanist is the theoretical ground upon which we can research new emerging economic ethics, ontologies, and behaviours in an attempt both to highlight and enact change. This lens suggests that the problem is not the ecological crises themselves, but our incapability to reimagine ourselves in relation to the neoliberal capitalist economy (Plumwood, 2007; Healy, 2015), whose discourses attach people to specific entrepreneurial subjectivities (e.g. Lemke, 2001). The hegemonic discursive construction of ‘the economy’ modifies our sensual perceptions and experiences, changes what it is possible to think, and limits the material and conceptual conditions of possibility for economic identifications (Gibson-Graham and Miller, 2015) – planetary degradation is the result of a ‘crisis of perception’ (Clarke and Mcphie, 2014: p.199).

Performative macropolitical change, then, requires a politics of the subject that looks to individual micropolitical receptivity and place-based action first (Connolly, 1999; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gibson et al., 2015b). Therefore the key mode of intervention is to release subjects from capitalist identities, and to activate ones that foreground human environmental wellbeing and that prompt them to perform more ethical economic assemblages: a process of ‘resubjectivation’ (Healy, 2015).

However, the rational communication of environmental knowledge has proved insufficient to cultivate such subjective change (Hobson, 2009; O’Brien, 2013). Researchers therefore need to innovate and attend to alternative ways to galvanise action (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009). In part, this can be stimulated through a new language of economy but, where capitalocentric discourse dominates, exploring subjects’ other sensory and affective dispositions may possess greater potential, as affective encounters can create strong emotions that forge new openings (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Roelvink, 2015; Roelvink, 2020). Broadly, affect refers to pre-personal and pre-cognitive intensities or forces which are produced through bodies, acted on bodies, and transmitted by bodies (Lorimer, 2008). Affect is an essential component of subjectivity, but it has thus far been under-theorised in terms of economic transformations (Richard and Rudnyckyj, 2009).

A nascent strand of DE literature has sought to engage with this potential through Latour’s (2004) concept of ‘learning to be affected’. As a frame of intervention that spotlights the body, Latour conceptualises it not through some internal essence, but as an interface that becomes more describable as it is put into motion by other entities and therefore learns to be affected. In this view, the body and the world (the body-world) are co-constituted; the world becomes richer and more highly differentiated as we learn to become more sensitive to the different elements around us. He uses the example of odour differentiation training sessions in the perfume industry. Here the odour kits, trainers, and trainees, as well as the material assemblages in which they are entangled, work together so that the trainees inhabit a new world that is more richly odoriferously differentiated as they learn to ‘acquire’ a more sensitive nose.

Our patterns of experience and the affections of the human body define the range of paths in thought that we can follow (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999; Hickey-Moody, 2013). Learning to be affected therefore has the potential to provoke changes in how we live with the planet (Cameron et al., 2011) when, through bodily learning, we are transformed to become other, and encounter our changing world in a way that renders us ‘newly
constituted beings in a newly constituted world’ (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009: p.322). Instead of being informed about the interdependent and co-evolutionary nature of the world, we can instead alter our unarticulated assumptions about it by experiencing it (Clarke and Mcphie, 2014).

From this, researchers have investigated experiments where people are creating more dynamic and posthumanist ontologies and body-worlds (or body-economies) (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009). For example, Cameron et al. (2011) examine how urban gardeners are learning to viscerally register changes in climate, and Roelvink (2015) describes how a small group of Australian farmers have learned to be affected by experiences of drought and to go against prevailing practices. However, despite suggesting a need for wide-ranging fieldwork and bodily experience to gauge its potential and amplify these practices, few studies exist grounded within this particular literature. This dissertation aims to begin to fill in this gap and to develop these ideas further.

2.4 The Ecovillage and Alternative Living

The ecovillage is a widely researched concept (Wagner, 2012), and a starkly obvious site for further engagement with these ideas. The ecovillage model is an explicit rejection of the dominant Western worldview, and endeavours to establish an alternative paradigm through the creation of a place-based intentional community and practices of low-impact self-sufficiency (Kasper, 2008; Ergas, 2010). They are where people are - perhaps most prominently - finding diverse new ways to live with the earth: radical experiments in constituting more-than-capitalist, equitable and sustainable forms of social organisation (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). It is therefore of ‘urgent practical consequence’ (Litfin, 2009: p.123).

The ecovillage model is a direct response to the ontological crisis of perception acknowledged in DE literature – it forms a ‘planetary knowledge community’, consciously grounded in an ontological commitment to posthumanist interdependence and the place of the human actor within a holistic cosmology (Litfin, 2009: p.125). In order for such a paradigm to function, participants must learn to be affected by their local ecology and to be made as a more-than-capitalist subject to diverge so radically from the norm. Ecovillages are ‘producing a new human body’ that experiences an intimate connection to the local environmental commons and more-than-human others (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009: p.332). They are committed to human development in physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual ways (Bang, 2005), but these experimental spaces have only just begun to be studied in terms of their affective, emotional, and embodied experiences (Fois, 2019).

2.5 Research Questions

The research attends directly to the frameworks outlined above to investigate the ontologies and practices of the IDEAL Society. It first seeks to address them fundamentally in terms of how a more-than-capitalist
economic assemblage is performed, before examining more deeply the emerging posthumanist and spiritual ontologies that define how its members live and work with the earth. Finally, it attends directly to the affective encounters inherent to the functioning of the ecovillage, and their potential for providing opportunities for economic resubjectivation.

1) How does the IDEAL Society constitute the performance of a more-than-capitalist economic assemblage?

2) How does the IDEAL Society navigate its interdependencies with the more-than-human world?

3) In what ways does the ecovillage provide opportunities for people to learn to be affected by the economic assemblage of the IDEAL Society?
3–Methodology

To investigate these questions, I chose a mixed methods approach to capture both the representational and the ‘more-than-representational’ (Lorimer, 2005) aspects of the embodied lives of my human and nonhuman subjects. The data was collected across August and September 2020. COVID-19 travel restrictions were an inescapable restraint on data collection and placed an emphasis on online methods, the infancy of which forces one almost to improvise and to be critically reflexive (Mann and Stewart, 2000).

3.1 Interviews

Through a primary gatekeeper, I carried out five semi-structured interviews over the phone (40-100 minutes) and through email. The research focuses necessitated a fluid form of data collection that allowed people to construct their own accounts of the ontologies, spatialities and experiences of social and economic life (Valentine, 2005; Dowling et al., 2016), including how participants perform and are transformed by the more-than-capitalist assemblage of the ecovillage (Roelvink, 2015). I therefore used a loose approach to interview structure, approaching them with a set of themes but generally only responding to steer the conversation towards the research topics (Valentine, 2005).

A rapport between interviewer and interviewee is essential for exploring such personal beliefs and interpretations (Dunn, 2016). However, online research proved to be difficult, as slow communication and a reduced ability to gain legitimacy with my subjects over email limited the quantity of data and the representativeness of participant selection. It fortunately still allowed for productive conversations with a diversity of roles and identities, and so it still feels acceptable to offer general comments about the ecovillage, although for these reasons the interviews are supplemented with other data. The interviewees are provided with pseudonyms to preserve anonymity (see Appendix 1 for more details).

Positionality is a key concept in geographical research because power relationships and identity are embedded within our interpretations of the world (Schoenberger, 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1993). It is a particularly important consideration for the interview data, because the participants and I operate using fundamentally different ontologies. With being embedded within Western epistemic frameworks and filtering their ideas through academic language and my own sociocultural position, I must acknowledge that I cannot be truly representative of their voice. Consequently I offer only my own interpretations. This is something I can begin to reconcile by being self-reflexive throughout my research and being conscious not to subvert their ideas (England, 1994). Furthermore, although I do not possess race or class advantages, with some participants being first-language French I was in a better position to dominate the conversation, which slightly dampened my ability to access more intimate thoughts or to communicate more openly.
3.2 Secondary Sources

I furthermore collected material through email and from websites, including texts, published documents, images, and videos. The internet opens up a wide scope for data collection, but it also creates ethical challenges, as informed consent and confidentiality are often still necessary (Dowling, 2016). In large part, explicit consent has been received. For openly advertised websites, it is essential not to appropriate somebody's work for unintended purposes (Bakardjieva and Feenberg, 2001), but given that the ones used are there specifically to project their ideas, I draw upon them openly. However, many images or videos provided through personal communication include clearly identifiable people from whom I cannot gain consent. For this reason, only those that clearly anonymise uncontactable participants (e.g. by hiding their faces) are displayed in the dissertation.

3.3 Discourse Analysis

Interview and textual data are investigated using a loose and unformulaic approach to discourse analysis. Discourse is a mediating lens used to construct reality and to make sense of one’s inhabited world (Waitt, 2016). In congruence with Diverse Economies literature, I seek to illuminate their non-capitalocentric discourses, and in particular: their conceptions of non-human agency; how they construct their economic identities; and upon what ontological assumptions they make economic and ethical decisions. This method also works to highlight intangible and immaterial knowledges – things such as spiritual presences, vibrations and emotions embedded in place that would not necessarily be picked up on through observation (Garrett, 2010).

Significantly, however, discourse and text are constructs of the embodied human mind that operate with and within body-worlds. The relevant spatialisations here are not wholly textually determined (Hinchliffe et al., 2005); a sole focus on discourse would therefore deaden their liveliness (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000) and the multi-sensory experiences of different bodies (Massumi, 2002). Posthumanist economic analysis situates language within a broader frame (Mitchell, 1998) that also examines its affective and material transformations (Grosz, 1995).

3.4 Visual Methods – Moving Imagery and Photographs

In addressing the third research question, this work therefore also employs visual methods. The internet provides a wide range of audio-visual, transmedia ecologies, which are ‘inhabited by diverse virtual nonhumans’ (Lorimer, 2010: p.240) and have the potential in research to magnify the other sensory and affective registers through which bodies inhabit the world (Whatmore, 2006). As Lorimer argues (2010: p.243; 2013), these moving and still images illuminate how bodies learn to be affected by the unfolding of events, so that we can ‘begin to viscerally sense [their] experience’ in place.
The idea that the body is an interface through which the world is registered (Latour, 2004) invites us to utilise it as an instrument for research, through embodied learning and observation of bodily encounter such as moving, smelling, and tasting (Cameron et al., 2011; Giardina and Newman, 2011). To the extent that I can therefore, I immerse myself in virtual human-nonhuman encounters - from everyday spiritual rituals to educational visits among other things - and ‘events’ where assemblages configure (McLeod, 2014) to transformatively affect the embodied economic actor. This means paying more-than-cognitive attention to the co-shaping of (non)human bodies in these encounters (Malone, 2016) and becoming attuned to how they are moved and enlivened (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015).

A key challenge is that visual imagery offers only a representation of embodied experience, rather than experience itself (Kaley et al., 2019). It provides access only to certain (i.e. visual and sometimes audial) aspects of the affective forces being displayed (Rose, 2011), restricting the extent to which I can become fully embroiled within them. As Garrett (2010: p.527) argues, visual representations are constructions where the subjectivity of the cameraperson, participants and viewers are ‘chaotically triangulated’ and are more specific and manipulated – and therefore less representative of everyday life - than an in-person experience. That said, this also provides certain benefits compared to field notes for example, as the analysis and presentation of visual imagery preserves something of the liveliness and immediacy of encounters that are otherwise ephemeral and lost in the process (Kaley et al., 2019).

Once again, my positionality was significant, as work on affect is inevitably insufficient in capturing the intricacies of the lifeworlds of its research subjects (e.g. Vannini, 2015). Attempts to represent in words the pre-cognitive aspects of people’s lives necessarily deaden the experience (Andrews et al., 2014), and have a wide range of possibilities shaped by my own sociocultural characteristics and worldviews (Clifford, 2001). The limits to human observations and knowings mean that apprehending the multitude of goings-on is only ever partial, precisely because we are not the only ones exerting agency, affecting, or being affected (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015). The most I can achieve therefore is not full explanations, but to evoke and provoke useful thoughts and interpretations (Lorimer, 2010). Thus I follow Kaley et al. (2018) in attempting to mitigate these issues by having interviewees engage with the encounters and unfoldings being analysed and supplement my analysis with their own views.
4.1 An Ecovillage Economy

The ecovillage does not conform to typical economic models; it forms an economic micro-system, where close-knit residency provides an infrastructure within which the market mechanism is overwhelmingly not the primary means of distributing resources (Blažek, 2016). Although necessarily embedded within the broader capitalist economy (Dawson, 2006; Price et al., 2020), to conceptualise the IDEAL Society in terms of conventional systemic dynamics such as capital accumulation and markets (i.e. capitalocentric discourse) would not capture its workings sufficiently and serve only to marginalise it (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). Instead, it is diverse: a contingent assemblage composed of capitalist, alternative, and unmistakably non-capitalist practices. An (economic) assemblage ‘looks at how objects, agents, affects and discourses are gathered together’ (Shaw, 2014: p.88). The ecovillage ‘economy’, then, becomes an ecological lens through which human behaviours are situated within encounters with nonhuman bodies and affects (Gibson-Graham and Miller, 2015). The IDEAL Society emerges through democratic participation; the cultivation of a collective identity; non-market and ethical performances; intimate ecological knowledges; and philosophical teachings. But simultaneously it is an assemblage of residential buildings, farm equipment, trees, rivers, crops, and fences.

Table 1 illustrates its heavy tilt towards alternative and non-capitalist practices and provides evidence for a vast array of different transactions, labour practices and enterprises driven specifically by non-capitalist ethical principles. I pick up on this framework throughout the rest of the chapter to outline their economic practices, but I stress that they are, by their very nature, contingently performed and articulated (Gibson-Graham, 2006). There is no model non-capitalist economy, and DE theory is specifically meant to be nondeterministic, even ‘weak’, in acknowledging that it cannot fully capture the complexity of the economic assemblage (Miller, 2013).

4.2 The Commons, Politics, and Property

The IDEAL Society is embedded within a shared environmental commons. The ecovillage purposefully configures its ‘physical and social materialities’ as common space that necessitates practices of ‘mutual support, interaction and acting together’ (Pickerill, 2016: p.2). Households are merged to forge non-market economies of scale, reducing individual time and the environmental footprint consumed through activities such as construction, cleaning, and cooking (Ibid.). Guillaume explains that: ‘we all eat together here, so that saves me the time of preparing three meals a day, right? But how do I participate? Well, I won’t necessarily...
Table 1. The Diverse Economy of the IDEAL Society Ecovillage. Adapted from Gibson-Graham’s (2005) framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Enterprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wage</strong></td>
<td><strong>Capitalist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consumption of non-local or mass-produced goods and services</td>
<td>- External paid work (e.g. in finance)</td>
<td>- n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative Market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alternative Paid</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alternative Capitalist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)</td>
<td>- Self-employed (e.g. life coaching, osteopathy)</td>
<td>- Not-only-for-profit enterprise (wellness centre to support spiritual values)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intense localism (50-75% food produced locally)</td>
<td>- In kind/non-monetised labour and internal participation for residency</td>
<td>- Organic permaculture farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ethical consumption (e.g. vegetarian diet, buying seasonal food, recycling)</td>
<td>- WWOOFing (visitors work on the farm for accommodation and food)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>- Combinations of part- and full-time work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unpaid</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non-Capitalist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consumption of own farmed subsistence (26-49%, with &gt;90% planned), renewable energy and goods</td>
<td>- Volunteering</td>
<td>- IDEAL Society NGO (UN-registered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- NGO ownership of property and common facilities (e.g. vehicle share, gym, common buildings, accommodation)</td>
<td>- Communal participatory work: 10-20 hours obligated weekly (e.g. construction, farming, cooking, cleaning, gardening)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Income pooling (suggested ~30% salary contribution if using accommodation)</td>
<td>- Informal exchange, barter, gifting, and reciprocity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Internal circulation of goods/household flows</td>
<td>- Shared environmental commons (e.g. water, gardens)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shared environmental commons (e.g. water, gardens)</td>
<td>- Cooperation and information exchange with neighbours, local associations, and experts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

prepare the meals, but I will certainly wash the dishes’, and he continues, ‘the essence of the collective is shattering that shell of the small family, and slowly extending social values to the whole of our community’.

Private property and market exchange are therefore not the primary governing principles of access to common resources such as water, food, and shelter – they are continuously negotiated through (in)formal socio-spatial and economic relations guided by philosophical rules. As Esme describes, ‘if I’m watering my garden too much then the other person won’t have enough water ... the pumping system is all connected’. She further explains: ‘it’s just like a huge family ... it’s all an organisation of trying to learn how to think further ahead’, and so they must consciously ask themselves, ‘if I do this, what impact will it have on others?’. The intimate connection
between the ecovillager and the local environmental commons forces them to acknowledge their impact on its wellbeing and on others.

Its economy is purposefully grounded upon navigating the ecologies within which it is embedded - the myriad nonhumans that constitute the commons are no mere backdrop, but active components of the Society’s daily workings. Gabriel explains that the 360-acre land consists of a plateau, a forest of fir and pine, two rivers, a sand creek, and prairies. Clearing rock from the soil is an annual event and a hindrance to farming, and the qualities of the soil determine where and what they can grow. The prairies are persistent producers of hay and therefore feeders of the Society’s livestock; the forests are providers of outdoor adventure and education for local schools. The beauty of the mountainous landscape and unique sunsets inspire people to sing and perform yoga communally, and to offer meditative therapies to visitors.

In order to give structure to these relations, the ecovillage is run democratically; the community votes for three board members, each of whom occupies a three-year term. The board is tasked with leading the community and acting according to its values in financial, legal, and organisational matters. IDEAL Society policy demands that the management structures work ethically and harmoniously, just as the parts of the body – the board is the brain; the community’s will the heart; the management and sector coordinators (those who fulfil the board’s directives) the hands; and the committees (e.g. for arts or construction) the muscles, as in Figure 2.

All ecovillage property (e.g. accommodation, facilities, vehicles) is owned communally through the IDEAL Society NGO. Housing varies – some are assigned dormitories or shared rooms, whilst others are

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**Figure 2.** The management and organisational structure of the IDEAL Society. The position on the power hierarchy declines moving from left to right. Source: Esme.
accommodated in mobile homes, or even in small houses for families. The situation is dynamic according to requirements, as Esme recalls: ‘sometimes with visitors coming in, you know, we would leave them a room and we would go in a tent for the summer’. Instead of paying formal rent, the Society pools income, demanding a minimum monthly contribution of around 400 CAD per person to cover expenses.

4.3 An Ethical Ecological Performance

This arrangement produces diverse practices of labour. Some work for wages in capitalist enterprises, but many do not. Onsite is the IDEAL Society Wellness Centre, a not-only-for-profit initiative in which self-employed members provide services (e.g. life coaching, osteopathy, prenatal education) to improve the wellbeing of visitors. But many participate in the ecovillage community full-time, providing non-monetised labour in return for food and residency: ‘100% working in the community, and not necessarily participating moneywise’ and saving money for the Society in ‘gardening, construction, repairs, things like that’ (Esme). This is not limited to members, as travelling visitors are openly invited to come and perform gardening work in return for food and accommodation, through the widely known WWOOFing programme. But there are no strict rules, and some perform a combination of labour practices. Gabriel, for example, is the head gardener – he communicates with the kitchen and the community, waters the garden, and harvests the vegetables. But he also provides clients with ‘healing energy work’ based on pseudoscientific ‘geobiology’ as a self-employed member of the Wellness Centre.

Production, consumption, and exchange are also performed with alternative ethical principles in mind. The ecovillage must take part in conventional market exchange for non-local goods and services, but this is minimised wherever possible. Internally, almost half of all food is produced within the property itself; a significant proportion of their energy is produced by solar panels; and goods are circulated within the community both through formal rules and through barter, gifting, and reciprocity. Externally, the policy obliges the Finance Team to continuously look for alternative options of exchange and resource distribution in order to provide mutual benefit in economic interactions wherever possible. It states that they must ‘Buy Local, Buy Seasonal, and Buy Organic’, arguing that current practice and food networks in the West are ecologically and socially damaging. It is only food which exceeds their own growing capacity that they purchase elsewhere and, apart from the very occasional item, all is sourced from local growers with similar principles. To aid this, the Society depends on cooperation and informational exchange with local actors. The ecovillage sells produce through a local Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme, for example: an agricultural model where local people support the farm in return for a negotiated return of the harvest.

The IDEAL Society is a therefore a counterperformative effort to constitute a community economy: an economy purposely and democratically performed in order to meet the needs and desires of the collective through ethical practices of coexistence and commonality (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Miller, 2013; Roelvink, 2015). This rests upon the conscious and purposeful construction of a new economic ethics. The Society policy, for example, conceptualises money as an ‘energy’:
‘In these times, in the general run of things, money has taken an incorrect position such that many people serve money, when in fact money, as part of general economic exchange, should serve people as they live their physical lives and pursue their spiritual destinies.’

It recognises that money is ‘the current medium of exchange’ but that its acquisition and use must be done with respect and trust. Work and labour are infused with meaning far beyond the profit motive at the IDEAL Society, as Antoine argues: ‘I know most people are obsessed with work and the money thing’, but ‘I have an inner call to do things ... this is a very different way of doing things’.
5-Energies, Auras, and Interdependencies

In this chapter, I detail how the IDEAL Society is developing an ontology and an economic ethics that recognise our interdependencies with the nonhuman world. I first outline their imaginings of materiality and nonhuman agency, before describing the ways in which these instigate behaviours and economic decisions that work to ethically negotiate these interdependencies. This opens up space for a discussion of how these ethics are then instilled in the next chapter.

5.1 Ontologies of Interdependence

An ontology is an understanding of the ultimate nature of reality; ontological assumptions determine what entities can exist, the categories in which they can be placed, and what becomes real in the world one inhabits (Sullivan, 2017). The ecovillage model requires the development of a holistic ontology of radical interdependence, and the conscious creation of a new economic ethics (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009; Litfin, 2009). As Orr (2004: p.190) argues, ‘it has to be about how we think ... the ultimate object of ecological design is the human mind’ (or the body, as Ch.6 will discuss). The members of the IDEAL Society demonstrate an unmistakably posthumanist ‘reimagining of agency and [their] place in the world’ (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015: p.511). Nature is teeming with agency - Esme describes nature as ‘a living being’ and ‘a wonderful teacher’, whilst Grace ‘put[s] nature first; nature was here before us’. They blur the boundary between human and environment, conceptualising the human species as a ‘family’ entangled with flows of energy and nonhuman agents.

Their ontology is multiple, diverse, and proliferating, rather than static or unchanging – they inhabit a body-world consisting of four layers that impinge on one another: the Spiritual, Mental, Astral and Physical ‘planes’. These help to organise their thinking and to guide the ways in which they engage with nonhuman actors. The three intangible, non-physical planes exist both within and beyond what is visible. This notion of an invisible world populates reality with a much wider range of agential nonhuman actors with whom they coevolve, including energies, spirits, and the four elements (Water, Air, Fire, and Earth). Such an ontology commands respect for that which is beyond the human, and as Grace remarks: ‘when you show respect for the invisible world, the invisible world will gift you in many, many ways’. It is in attending to these spiritual actors that the human/nonhuman relations and economic decisions within the Society begin to make sense (Beban and Work, 2014).

The interviewees imbue this (in)visible spirit and agency into all things; they stress the immanency of life, displaying key characteristics of an animistic worldview (see Ingold, 2011). That is to say that they inhabit a body-world in which everything is living, affecting, and forever becoming (Clarke and Mcphie, 2014). Nonhumans possess an aura; they radiate an energy ecovillagers can feel. Gabriel finds that, through his work with the energies in the garden, he is ‘participating in the vibratory evolution of the planet’. Meanwhile, Grace acknowledges the liveliness of the water running through the property: ‘for me, it’s honouring the element of
water, the spirits that are around the water ... the water for me has an aura’. In contrast to the externalising nature of capitalism, the imburement of spirit into the more-than-human world draws into sharp focus the ecologies in which human economies are embedded. As Gibson-Graham et al. (2016: p.708) argue: ‘it is a measure of the success of Western systems of thinking that the idea that animate and inanimate materials might possess creative, agentic properties is so strange or ludicrous’.

5.2 Nonhuman Communication

This ontology compels the members of the IDEAL Society to attend to ‘the lives and livelihoods of other more-than-human entities’ (Roelvink, 2015: p.233). It shapes the possibility for engagement with nonhumans, as it creates an ethical obligation to care for them as subjects in their own right (Roelvink, 2015). An animistic ontology is not simply a way of believing about a lively world – rather, it suggests more fundamentally a condition of being in, and alive to, it: sensing, perceiving, and acting within a dynamic environment (Ingold, 2011). The ubiquitous presence of agency requires constant awareness and attention by human actors (Brightman et al., 2013; Sullivan, 2017).

Esme’s husband applies his work on osteopathy to attend to the ‘life force’ flowing through trees: ‘we try to dialogue with their level of consciousness ... sometimes [he] goes around and with osteopathy, he tests the trees, like oh, this tree is not feeling good’. The trees are living members of the community and not simply resources for the Society’s instrumental use. He tests the ‘body’ of the tree to find imbalances in the energy that flows through it. In the interests its wellbeing, he then works to remove any ‘blockages’ so that this energy is ‘balanced between the earth and the sky’ (Esme). Meanwhile, Gabriel is particularly conscious of respecting the spiritual needs of the earth. Before constructing a greenhouse, he worked intuitively to find the most favourable place to build it, using ‘a method to approach the invisible world of energy’. He used ‘dowsing’ techniques to locate areas of ‘vitality’ and where vibrations emanating from the earth would disturb the plants – he argues that respecting the needs of the earth will work to the benefit of all entities involved.

Everyday interactions are governed by an intimate knowledge and observations of the members’ surroundings. Antoine is careful not to plan too rigidly when he engages with nonhuman entities: ‘it’s more about listening to nature and seeing what it means, and then knowing that nature’s intelligent and letting it do what it needs to do itself’. As Esme states: ‘we definitely do respect everything that’s around us, and also, I guess, on a philosophical level, if we’re going to build a house and we have to, you know, cut a tree down or move the animals around or something, we definitely do want to communicate [with them]’. Life at the IDEAL Society is less about reworking ecologies for their advantage than it is about responding to the agency of earth others and evolving with them.
5.3 Synergy

The economy of the IDEAL Society, then, is not an independent system, nor an exclusively human activity; it is a multispecies community of interdependent, interrelated, and co-constitutive livelihoods embedded in local and global ecologies (Gibson and Miller, 2015). The ontologies of the ecovillage render these relationships visible by animating other species and entities and assigning them agency, thus creating an axiomatic ethical imperative to include them in economic decisions. As a result, the IDEAL Society engages with natural ecosystems synergistically; its members make them work in their interests, but not at the expense of their biotic or ecological integrity (Mathews, 2011). It is a fundamentally different relationship with earth others to that of the capitalist economy – rather than powerful exploiters, they are simply agents of ecosystem evolution (Ibid.).

The IDEAL Society’s organic permaculture farm embodies this notion (Figure 3). Permaculture (i.e. ‘permanent agriculture’) is a systems-based agricultural approach that seeks self-sustainability and self-regulation by reproducing the inter- and intra-species interactions that occur in natural ecosystems (Mollison and Holmgren, 1978; Litfin, 2009). Ecological diversity is a key characteristic of the farm: orchards grow cherries, apples, pears, and plums; the garden produces a range of vegetables, herbs, and flowers; the goats, chickens, horses, and llamas graze the prairies; and beehives ensure pollination. An information pamphlet describes the farm as follows:

‘A farm is an ecosystem like forests or wetlands in which all elements interact with each other. All of these elements evolve under the direction of nature’s intelligence and its laws. The farmer’s eternal quest is to understand the extent of this intelligence. But his real challenge is to manage the farm’s ecosystem, fulfilling its own needs while caring for all living beings, as nature always does.’

The farmer here does not effortlessly mould nature; their job is ‘to cultivate harmonious exchanges through the process of nutrition’ (IDEAL Society, 2021b), yielding food and energy for its users without compromising

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**Figure 3.** The IDEAL Society organic permaculture farm. Left: A cultivated field of different complementary crops, including swiss chard and leeks. Right: A selection of harvested produce. Source: Gabriel.
ecological relationships. As Antoine explains: ‘we don’t need any kind of pesticide or things like this’ – the interacting species are expected to perform such functions themselves. For Esme, this means planting, for example, vegetables, trees, and bushes in such a way that they act co-operatively, so that ‘you have to take the least care of them because they just kind of work together and in harmony to produce’. In a drastic divergence from the norm, the perceived ability of nonhuman entities to cultivate food is elevated to exceed human actors. As Society policy contends: ‘there are many entities in the realms around us that play a significant role in how food works’.
6. An Embodied Education for a Posthumanist Economic World

This main and final chapter attends directly to the embodied and affective encounters that work to nurture the aforementioned ontologies and practices. Through visual analysis, I present evidence of opportunities whereby participants learn to be affected and openings are created for economic resubjectivation, supplemented by participant reflections of such encounters. I first discuss the internal philosophies around learning and corporeality, before examining how ecovillagers themselves and then wider groups participate in this learning.

6.1 ‘Consciousness’

Cultivating economic subjects who choose to perform the economic assemblage of the IDEAL Society is a fundamental concern – it requires an active politics of becoming to shift ingrained perceptions about the nature of reality (Connolly, 1999; Gibson-Graham, 2006). Guillaume locates the root problem: ‘in the subconscious psyche of humanity, there’s something wrong ... we’ve separated from the universe in our psyche’. But resisting hegemonic capitalist discourses simply by teaching marginalised posthumanist ones is not enough (Roelvink, 2020) – instead, the Society primarily pursues an embodied education through learning to be affected.

Affect represents ‘a different kind of intelligence about the world’ (Thrift, 2004: p.60). Bodily learning is fundamental to improving wellbeing, as Antoine argues: ‘the most important thing is to sense nature and be in touch with nature’. Finding more sustainable ways of living comes from recognising that ‘nature is a living being, and the thing is, we have to understand and we have to feel this being, this living creator’. Feeling and experience are paramount for Grace too: ‘when we get in the feeling realm, you know, intellect just has to jump out of the window because you have to really feel [your work] ... I know it [environmental change] is probably being taught, but you have to live it too’. She explains that somatic experience ‘does change behaviours, because it’s direct ... feeling and action are a process of understanding’.

Gabriel quotes a core philosophical teaching: ‘what everyone calls “reality” corresponds to the degree of consciousness they have managed to achieve’, and so to fulfil human needs, rather than attaining material wealth or prestige, we must ‘think instead of changing something in your perceptions, cultivate the faculty of experiencing subtle sensations’. The emphasis is placed not only on knowledge, but a ‘consciousness’ and awareness of ourselves, and therefore of our relation to the nonhuman world: ‘consciousness is the basic truth that governs the world’ (Guillaume).

Based on this philosophy, the Society seeks to become a ‘Living University of Education’ and provide people with a new philosophy of life. The Society website describes it as follows:

‘Every experience is an opportunity for discovery and learning. IDEAL is a school of life where the wealth of multicultural and inter-generational exchanges contributes to broadening the mind, where everyone is called in turn to play the role of educator and student according to their skills, and where nature holds a
privileged place. Any activity can be experienced as a reflection of our inner life through which we learn to better know ourselves and to develop harmonious relationships with others and the world around us. We favour a process of self-education where qualities and virtues are cultivated in order to grow in consciousness and understanding of oneself (IDEAL Society, 2021c: emphasis my own).

Human consciousness is a product of our corporeality; it is tied to the body and its ability to sense and register difference (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Casey, 2001; Latour, 2004; Larsen and Johnson, 2016). Therefore the human body as a subject is constituted and reconstituted ‘by the entirety of human and non-human conditions of the world that affect us and from which we learn’ (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009: p.322; Hickey-Moody, 2013). Increasing one’s consciousness in this case, then, is to reconstitute the body-world and to be transformed through relations and encounters with other entities within the economic assemblage of the IDEAL Society (Cameron et al., 2011; Roelvink, 2020). It is to remould and re-experience the world around us in the embodied mind – in learning to viscerally register and recognise our inextricable links to nonhuman agency at the ecovillage, we can open up ground for new identities and ways of thinking (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009).

6.2 Cultivating the Ecovillager

Maintaining the Society’s viability necessitates the continual reproduction of the ontologies and more-than-capitalist identifications of its members. It must therefore assemble the conditions within which they can learn to be affected by the configuration of the ecovillage itself. Rituals, routines, and practices are centred around this ideal of education through experience – as Antoine explains: ‘with all the things that we do with our way of living, it’s a tool to connect with this [nature and ourselves]’. The local environmental commons forges an immediacy of one’s environmental impacts and relations. In doing so, it produces a new human body in the form of the ecovillager – one that experiences direct connections to its nonhuman neighbours, the hydrological cycle, and the ecologies within which it is entangled (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009). The invented, abstract life of the regular capitalist individual separated from its environmental relations (Connolly, 1999) is dispelled, thus allowing them to affect and be affected by other ecological entities.

Activities in the forests and gardens prioritise this learning. In Figure 4, through listening and opening themselves up to being affected by the land, by other species, and by the spiritual life within them, the ecovillagers are attuning themselves to the lively natural world, and thus reorienting their sensual perceptions and experiences. Their bodies are in process: acquiring new ways of seeing, sensing, and perceiving the landscape (Hinchliffe et al., 2005). This requires registering difference within the landscape and becoming acutely aware of the various goings on. Antoine compares this to tuning a guitar:

‘You tune your guitar, and then once you hear your sound, you can tune your guitar with this. This is mostly what we do: we tune ourselves, and then from that we can play the music, and what we will be doing will be harmonious. And then from that, of course, it won’t have, let’s say, catastrophic effects on the environment.’
He suggests that cultivating an awareness of nonhumans is an iterative, affective process of co-transformation – through these repeated encounters, nonhuman entities both affect the ecovillagers and are simultaneously affected by them.

The children in particular grow up to viscerally respond, for example, to the trees, the grasses, and the rivers so that ecological processes render them attentive in ways that are rare in capitalist society. As Esme argues, ‘I think it’s like, not even a thinking process, but it’s really what they’ve experienced and what they know as a reality’. She continues: ‘for the children, to have to be in contact with nature, first of all, I think is one of the most important things ... they’re in touch with reality, with wood, with animals, with things like rivers flowing – this isn’t part of reality for a city child’.

Beekeeping in particular arose as a crucial and intimate practice for learning to be affected (Figure 5). It is clearly not just about the honey, as the promotional video explains: ‘they don’t think about production so much; they think about the bees themselves’. Antoine was much more concerned about the philosophical foundations than the sustainable practices themselves, contending that ‘it’s also a way to reach other parts of myself’, asking: ‘what is it that I can connect with myself through this work?’. To achieve this, the beekeepers take their time to take in the multi-sensual experience of beekeeping. This means being openly receptive to the intensities produced by their sounds, vibrations, and movements so as to be affected and put into motion by their different behaviours.

For Grace, how harmoniously and sustainably we can live with the earth is proportional to one’s level of tuning and the body’s ability to register ecological difference. She explains that ‘some people can garden, and some people can’t, and I can because I see the subtleties of it’. She recalls her experiences:

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*Figure 4. Photo of members of the IDEAL Society gathered in the forest.* A cello and a violin are played as the ecovillagers celebrate and sing to evoke the spirits of the forest. They raise their arms to open themselves up to receive the ‘energies’ emanating from the forest, and to sensitize their bodies through being affected by its spiritual life. Source: IDEAL Society.
I feel the gifts from it, like I can get stopped mid-gardening and just gaze at a flower you know, or be stopped by a butterfly or bird and it seems like I’m really in the right zone in my own energy. All that stuff gets closer to me like, I see more butterflies, I see more birds, I see the eagle will fly overhead and I’m like, wow, I must be right in my centre in order for that kind of beauty to manifest ... if that stuff manifests, you’re vibrating with it.

Through her euphoric experiences of gardening, she is acquiring new eyes that see the diversity of life within the ecovillage; that recognise her interconnectedness with the livelihoods of other species; and that prompt her to respond to their needs. Simultaneously therefore, she is acquiring an ontological imperative to protect the environment with which she ‘vibrates’ and with which her body becomes newly co-constituted.

6.3 Guiding Others

Maintaining the ecovillagers themselves is not enough, however. Environmental crisis will not be averted by salvaging a 360-acre more-than-capitalist economy, nor through the ecovillage movement on its own. A far wider range of people must learn to be affected by the conditions of the Anthropocene to create performative effects at more impactful scales. The ecovillage policy acknowledges this issue:

‘The Society will not be an island unto itself. It will develop its programs and models in a way that will enable them to be replicated and expanded to other places and by other people. By spreading this
work to the world, new energies and young people will be attracted to the Society to replenish, revivify, and renew its work continuously.’

The primary outreach program is the IDEAL Tour: a day trip where local schools are invited to visit the IDEAL Society and students are split into groups that rotate around several activities. These include forest walks; visiting chickens, horses, ponies, and goats; working in the garden and greenhouse; and an introduction to beekeeping. An advertising pamphlet describes the Tour as ‘an unforgettable adventure in a beautiful learning environment in nature’ and ‘a full day of discovery, hands-on experiences, sharing and FUN!’ At each station, the children are invited to learn through discovery and perceptual fine-tuning through direct affective encounters with other species, as such encounters can bring confronting challenges to the way subjects think (Roelvink and Zolkos, 2015).

Rather than teachers, the ecovillagers act as guides to facilitate bodily learning, as Antoine explains: ‘it’s not like we fill them with information ... it’s a lot more about sort of sensing nature, becoming connected to nature and recognising, seeing, existing, and smelling’. In Ingold’s (2000) terms, the ecovillager ‘experts’ induct the young ‘novices’ into the environment of the IDEAL Society by guiding them through it, encouraging them to attune their attention so that they too can cultivate a capacity to respond to environmental cues. Much like in Latour’s (2004) perfume kit example, the situated nature of the children - alongside the ecovillagers within the economic assemblage of the IDEAL Society - works to transform their worlds so that they are more ecologically differentiated and interconnected. The goal is to allow the children to sense more-than-cognitively the agency of, and their entanglement with, the livelihoods of other species, and thereby ‘resituate the non-human in ethical terms’ (Gibson et al., 2015b: p.3; Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015).

The children’s bodies encounter animals that affect and enliven them; they put them into motion (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015). In Figure 6, the children are prompted to pay attention to the movements of the bees so as to learn to be affected by them. At the beekeeping station, Antoine teaches them about their lifecycle, before asking them ‘to be silent and just listen to what is going on there’, he says, ‘and of course they hear the buzz of the bees, and then from that they express what they feel and what they now know ... they discover this new world and then this is something that they are in touch with’. As the bees elicit a visceral response from the children, they begin to tune their ears to render them attentive to the buzzing - they develop minds that pay attention to the livelihood of the bee; the agency that it exerts through pollination; and their interrelationships with human economies.

The chickens produce a similar effect (Figure 7). As opposed to seeing decontextualised images of a chicken in a classroom, the encounter allows the children to feel it through their fingers, their eyes, and their ears, which prompts them to express awe. The chicken produces an affective force that can be retained by the bodies of the children (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994) and as a result reconfigure their embodied knowledge about the animal so that it appears more agentic and alive. The children’s bodies are being remade so that they inhabit a body-world that is about the bees and the chickens as much as it is about them.
Finally, the orchard is a site where Grace guides the children to sense the livelihood of the tree (Figure 8). As she explains:

‘We put our backs to the tree, we put our hand on our Solar Plexus relating to the sun, and we put our other hand behind our back so we could feel the tree. And then I talked to them about bringing in, you know, imagine the sunlight was coming into your solar plexus and then going back to the tree and you’re giving love to the tree and the trees given love to you and they just absolutely loved it.’

Figure 6. Frame still of children being introduced to the IDEAL Society bees from a promotional video. Two ecovillagers point to the bees. They quickly attract the attention of the group of children, prompting them to close in on the display and observe their movements, the buzzing noises, and their interactions. Source: IDEAL Society.

Figure 7. Frame still of the encounter between a group of schoolchildren and a chicken from a promotional video. The children are asked to stroke the chicken, and the encounter between them makes the children visibly excited and enlivened; they immediately stop talking and express awe. They discover the feeling of its feathers and sense how it reacts to their touch. Source: IDEAL Society.
Previously the inert producer of fruit for human consumption, the trees are newly registered as agentic, lively beings with their own lives and needs to which we must attend. The assemblage that learns reconstitutes the orchard and the forest, repopulating them with moral entities capable of love, for which they must bear a responsibility. The ontologies that sustain the practices of the IDEAL Society, or that may sustain future more-than-capitalist economies, are beginning to develop on the day of the IDEAL Tour.

*Figure 8. Photo of children planting in the orchard.* The children are asked to work together to put their hands to the earth in helping to plant saplings. The ecovillager guides them as they cultivate an ability to attend to the needs of a forming tree and they are taught about its livelihood. Source: Gabriel.
7. Conclusions

‘Affect is not epiphenomenal to global transformations. Rather it is absolutely crucial to producing the subjects who in turn create global economic shifts through cultural labour.’

(Richard and Rudnyckyj, 2009: p.60)

Through a DE lens, this dissertation has traced an alternative economic geography of the IDEAL Society ecovillage. After first illuminating the performances that constitute the more-than-capitalist assemblage of the Society, it has highlighted how this particular ecovillage uses its spiritual ontologies to navigate the interactions with the nonhuman world, before analysing the practices through which they activate economic subjects that choose to perform posthumanist economic worlds.

The ecovillage economy is performed through a diverse range of alternative and non-capitalist practices. Its spatial configuration merges households into a wider collective that embeds economic life within a shared environmental commons requiring continuous negotiation. Economic decisions are made co-operatively and democratically – the IDEAL Society is a counterperformative effort to constitute a community economy that meets the needs of the collective, including both its human and nonhuman entities.

This effort is backed by a posthumanist ontological imperative that imubes spirit and agency into all things. In contrast to capitalocentric discourses that categorise nature as inert, nonhumans possess an agency and radiate an aura. The notion of an invisible world and distributed agency obliges the Society to engage with ecosystems synergistically and to attend to the needs and livelihoods of nonhuman entities. The IDEAL Society ‘economy’ is a continuous ethical negotiation and coexistence with the more-than-human world; they aim to guide ecosystem evolution rather than profiting from its destruction.

Through its educational system, these ontologies and practices are cultivated as its members learn to be affected by entities within the economic assemblage of the IDEAL Society. It is configured in such a way that daily activities are centred around the reproduction of the more-than-capitalist identifications of its subjects, by increasing their ‘consciousness’ and awareness of their place within the more-than-human world. The ecovillage is actively creating a new human body in the form of the ecovillager as they attune themselves to local ecologies and learn to be affected, through a process of co-transformation that reconstitutes both the ecovillager and the world around them. By acquiring new ways of sensing and registering the landscape, they are prompted to act synergistically with these ecosystems. Through the IDEAL Tours, the ecovillage invites local schoolchildren so that they too can learn to be affected. Guiding them through affective encounters with animals, forests and the garden, the children are able to sense their inextricable entanglements with nonhuman entities and begin to develop a moral imperative to care for them.

Most people already care for the environment in some way – it is only that their attachments to capitalist identities and ontologies narrow the realm of possibility within which they can act harmoniously with it (Roelvink, 2020). Learning to be affected by the conditions of the Anthropocene and learning to sense a world that is alive, interlinked and teeming with agency is not about instilling care for it; it is about redirecting and reframing the care that people already possess (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The IDEAL Society aims to affect people so that their co-produced body-world makes acting in an ethical and ecologically sustainable way axiomatic, or at least more easily producible by their prescribed patterns of thought. It is evidently possible to prompt the creation of posthumanist economic subjects when they transform their sensual perceptions and experiences so that they are unavoidably aware of their embeddedness within the economies of other entities and the benefits of acting in their favour.

But there are limitations. However transformative the encounters are on the day that a child attends an IDEAL Tour, they must be put in the context of their entire lives. As Roelvink (2020: p.427) argues, ‘economic transformation does not start from a blank page’ – people are already attached to the world in different ways, and they are produced as bodies through affections formed through innumerable encounters. This single day might have a lasting influence, but it may equally be overshadowed by the capitalocentric discourses and experiences that dominate when they leave the ecovillage. The continual exposure to entities with which the ecovillagers can learn to be affected in this way is not similarly available for the schoolchildren, nor the wider
public, and so performative change is perhaps unlikely to result from this limited learning. It is hard to yet imagine how what this dissertation has shown could be translated to macropolitical economic change, or how open people would be to its ideas.

Perhaps, then, it poses more questions than it answers. But nevertheless, it is illustrative of the potential of the bodily learning that this ecovillage promotes in driving transformative economic change. By no means is it conclusive or prescriptive of an answer for tackling these issues, but it points to opportunities whereby we can amplify the voices of those working to tackle the crisis of perception. The IDEAL Society is but one of a diverse range of communities around the world doing so, and it must be mentioned that indigenous groups globally have been producing similar ontologies and nonhuman relationships for far longer than Western intentional communities. There is therefore a clear case for continued transformative research in the future that engages with these groups, both in ecovillages and elsewhere, so that their work may provide at least part of the solution to the challenges we face this century.
## Appendix 1: Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Role in Ecovillage</th>
<th>Interview Method</th>
<th>Interview Length (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Esme</td>
<td>Full-time resident; former board member; life coach at the IDEAL Wellness Centre</td>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoine</td>
<td>Full-time resident; gardener; beekeeper</td>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Part-time resident; accounts manager; performs liaison work with local communities; offers services in angel readings and communication</td>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>Guillaume</td>
<td>Full-time resident; head of music</td>
<td>Video call</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>Full-time resident; head gardener; ‘geobiologist’; performer of ‘bio-energy’ work at the IDEAL Wellness Centre</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


