MANUFACTURED COMMONS:
COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP AND DIFFERENTIAL COMMONING

by

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"*Something opens*

Our wings." *(Rumi)*

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Introduction

A flashing light hung across the state highway is the only indication of an intersection. Without it, it's easy to miss the road to 'Pine Ridge Co-op'[1] – one of New Hampshire's growing number of manufactured housing cooperatives, or 'resident-owned communities' (or ROCs)[2]. Getting the light in place was one of the more recent achievements of community members who had long worried about turning onto the highway at dark. Travelling down the small road, I notice a set of mailboxes amid containers of carefully tended flowers, a bulletin board with notices about upcoming yard sales, and a poster eliciting community volunteers. Driving around the neighborhood, I finally spot the community hall, a small green building located amongst the rows of homes. 'Jeff,' a long-term resident and the current president of the cooperative's governing board, comes out to greet me. "I've already got about five calls asking who was here," he said smiling. Clearly, my arrival has not gone unnoticed in the small, watchful neighborhood.

After retrieving some bottled water in the community hall, Jeff takes me for a walking tour of Pine Ridge. There are seventy-two homes in the community, each arranged on a fifty by one hundred foot plot set along one of four tidy streets that used to be littered with abandoned vehicles. The cooperative board had recently put up a notice on the bulletin board asking people to remove their neglected cars from the streets, and to everyone's surprise, people complied. In the past, the landlord used other means of

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[1] The names of the communities as well as interviewees have been changed to protect anonymity.

[2] ROCs are associated with the national nonprofit organization ROC USA, which helps residents collectively purchase their manufactured home communities.

ensuring compliance. Jeff gestures down the street, "Literally the [previous landlord] would drive around and if he didn't like you or he saw something he didn't like, your rent went up. And there was no set amount it went up or anything. If you made him mad, your rent went up! This was a way to govern if you will – govern by intimidation."[3]

In the United States, 'manufactured housing' developed from the recreational travel and automotive industries, but the category includes a variety of housing styles and layouts – a reality which becomes clear as we walk the streets of Pine Ridge and Jeff points out the different models. Some are indistinguishable from conventional 'stick-built' homes, while others are smaller and still have a visible hitch. Enacted in 1976, the Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards Act set out regulations for the "housing design and construction, strength and durability, transportability, fire resistance and energy efficiency" of 'manufactured housing' (George and Yankausas 2011:4). However, regardless of whether a home is 'pre-76,' 'manufactured housing' is generally the acceptable term due to the negative connotations of 'mobile home' and 'trailer.'

Figure 1. Street of Pine Ridge Co-op.

It is perhaps some of these stereotypes that have lead to greater scrutiny of the community by officials from the nearby town.[4] Pine Ridge community members have been informed, for example, that their electrical services are not up to code. "Well, of course they're not [up to code]," Jeff tells me, "They've been here for 35 years," installed

[3] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

[4] Many towns and cities have introduced local zoning laws, which have restricted the placement of manufactured homes to parks or communities, and constrained the locations of these communities (George and Yankausas 2011:7).

long before Pine Ridge became a cooperative.[5] But since a community-wide upgrade of the electrical infrastructure is currently impossible given the cooperative's budget, the community has been given the leeway to make gradual improvements as they replace individual homes. While much of the infrastructure in the community is in need of replacing, Jeff is anxious to show me one of their recent upgrades in the community's pump house – a new generator to back up the water pump that serves the park. After the electricity failed thirty-eight times in three years – often resulting in a loss of water since the old generator was inadequate to keep the water pump going – the cooperative membership voted to spend their shared funds to replace the generator. They have not lost water since.

Beyond the pump house is what used to be a ball field with a backstop and bases, but is now just waist-high, mosquito-ridden grass. While the field is part of the eight acres owned by the cooperative, the land sits atop a well that provides water for the nearby town as well as Pine Ridge. A recent law changed the 'buffer area' around water wells to fifteen hundred feet, which means that the ball field now must remain fallow land.[6] Cooperative members are in constant negotiation with the Department of Environmental Services (DES) and the nearby town officials over the appropriate use of this land, which at various times has served as a

Figure 2. Abandoned ball field.

[5] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

[6] Fifteen hundred feet actually includes much of the Pine Ridge community, meaning that at least part of the community constitutes illegal development. Ultimately, the community has been given variances and is allowed to run in violation to the law (Interview W2, 07.14.13).

ball field, an area in which to burn brush and compost yard waste, and most recently, an 'au natural' buffer-zone.

As we reach the end of the cooperative's property line, and trace our way along it back to the community hall, Jeff tells me that the owner of the land that surrounds most of the cooperative is anxious to buy Pine Ridge. He ostensibly wants to preserve the community, even offering to upgrade the infrastructure and, at least initially, to keep rent low. While everyone in the community is acutely aware of the offer on the table, Jeff seems certain that the cooperative will endure. "[The cooperative model] gives people the ability to take control of their own destiny, […] People here want to live the American Dream, not be victimized by it."[7]

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Origins

Caught between the dual crises of declining economic opportunity and diminishing public assistance in the United States, many people on the geographic and economic fringe are considering new ways of conceptualizing and enacting their communities. In this "creative cramped space" between the individual and the state, the private and the public, these people are acting and owning *in common* – from organizing car-sharing programs to forming cooperative (co-op) housing projects – largely driven by material needs rather than any particular political agenda or ideology. While not often recognized in literature – academic or otherwise – these efforts offer a unique perspective into new ways of constituting social, political and economic relations on a local level. In this research project, I examine one of these growing areas of experimentation in the

[7] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

United States – the development of manufactured housing cooperatives or resident owned communities (ROCs).

The initial impetus for this project emerged from the convergence of several professional, personal and academic experiences and interests, beginning with my work as a researcher for a nonprofit – the Aspen Institute's Community Strategies Group (CSG). At CSG I had the opportunity to work with a number of local, mostly rural, community efforts across the United States aimed at addressing the seemly intractable problems faced by those who are geographically – and often economically – isolated. One of the organizations that CSG collaborated with was the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund (NHCLF), which has been offering loans and technical support to encourage the formation of manufactured housing cooperatives for over twenty years. There are now over one hundred such cooperatives in New Hampshire alone, and the idea is spreading to other states largely due to the efforts of ROC USA, a network of resident owned communities (ROCs).

Manufactured housing, often colloquially known as 'mobile homes,' constitutes a significant portion of the housing stock – and serves as a primary affordable housing option for low-income residents – in the rural areas of the United States. The median annual income of households living in manufactured homes is $30,000 – almost forty percent less than that of households residing in 'conventional housing' (George and Yankausas 2011:3). Approximately thirty-four percent of manufactured homes are located in 'parks' or communities, and these households tend to have lower incomes and are more likely to be elderly than those in 'scattered-site' homes (7). Only fourteen percent of these 'park' residents own the lot where their home is located, making them

vulnerable to rent hikes, poor-quality maintenance, failing infrastructure, and eviction if there is a transfer in the ownership of the land (Ibid.). In response to the threat of having the land sold out from beneath them, residents around the country are organizing cooperatives in order to collectively purchase, and democratically manage, their communities.

Sites

While I originally planned to utilize a survey tool to collect the views of ROC members from around the country about the processes of organizing and maintaining such cooperatives, I decided that the localized nature of these practices called instead for a focus on a few specific communities. The use of case studies is, after all, “a methodological approach that perhaps best allows for the representation of often quite complex lived stories, shared histories and social events" (Holder and Flessas 2008:308). Thus, taking cues from feminist geography’s focus on ‘the everyday’ (Nast 1994) and strategy of ‘reading for difference’ (Gibson-Graham 2008:11), I examined the ‘nitty-gritty’ elements – the fundamental, practical and often messy details – involved in the collective management of three manufactured housing cooperatives. This entailed observing and discussing co-op members’ daily practices related to community spaces and resources. Due to the localized nature of these projects, rather than trying to draw comparisons between the case studies, I attempted to tease out distinct tendencies in each community in order to speak in a grounded and dialectical way to both praxical and theoretical questions. Primarily, I chose the communities – two in New Hampshire and one in Wisconsin – because they each represent a different stage of development in the

cooperative process. The members of these communities are also negotiating a number of localized issues that highlight thematic trajectories related to socio-spatial relations in manufactured housing cooperatives.

The first community I spent time in, 'Green Acres Estates,' is a seventy-unit manufactured housing community located outside a small city in Wisconsin. I decided to include this community in my research, because, at the time of my first visit in June 2013, residents were at the end of what had been a year of organizing to form the first resident owned manufactured housing community in the state. In the backroom of a nearby bowling alley, I was able to witness the final community-wide meeting where Green Acres residents voted unanimously to accept the co-op rules and bylaws that they had drawn up over a period of several months. Returning in August, I participated in the community's picnic celebration of their status as co-op members and collective property owners. During my time in Green Acres, I attended meetings and social events, spoke informally with residents over cold beverages and walks around the community, and interviewed residents who were involved, to varying degrees, in the organizing process. I also had the opportunity to speak with two technical assistance providers from a regional nonprofit, who had been working with Green Acres residents throughout the year, and a representative of ROC USA – the organization providing the co-op with a low-interest loan to facilitate the purchase of the property. Ultimately, I ended up utilizing my experiences and conversations in Green Acres, in chapter one, to discuss how residents are exercising a collective right to housing in their formation of a resident owned community.

In July 2013, I then travelled to New Hampshire to visit two additional resident owned manufactured housing communities. My first stop was 'Pine Ridge Cooperative,' a seventy-three-unit co-op located in a region where over thirty-six percent of the population lives in manufactured housing. In 1993, when their landlord decided to sell the community, residents mobilized and used financing from New Hampshire Community Loan Fund (NHCLF) to convert their community into a resident ownership model. I was interested in visiting Pine Ridge not only because of the duration of the cooperative, but also due to the fact that as the reserves of the Pine Ridge have grown over the years, the members have invested some of these funds back into NHCLF to help finance other park conversions. This investment seemed to imply a particular community commitment to the cooperative idea. While I was in Pine Ridge, I attended co-op board meetings and conducted semi-structured interviews with co-op members – each of whom had a different relationship with, and involvement in, the everyday management of the community. My research in Pine Ridge, not only informed the discussion of shared equity in the first thesis chapter, but also formed the basis for my analysis of the commons and commoning (the 'doing' of the commons) (Linebaugh 2008) in the second chapter.

Traveling to the southern part of New Hampshire, I visited the twenty-seven-unit 'Blue Lake Cooperative,' located on the outskirts of a town with a total population of around four thousand people.[8] In response to eviction notices, the residents of Blue Lake – many of whom could not afford to move – organized a cooperative in 2008 and successfully outbid an outside investor to buy the land underneath their homes with the

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[8] 2010 U.S. Census.

help of NHCLF. One factor that initially drew my attention to this community was the fact that in addition to home sites, the co-op's property includes a large house, a commercial garage and an advertising billboard – which adds a layer of complexity to the management of the community. In addition to participating in informal conversations in Blue Lake, I had the opportunity to attend the co-op's annual membership meeting and to interview members. Through these experiences, in the first chapter, I consider the development of, and challenges to, constituent power in this community.

Process

Throughout the research process, I remained cognizant of my positionality – especially in terms of class and gender. My association with a university and my status as a student signaled a certain class affiliation – especially since many residents had not attended college. When they did – they made a point of telling me. Access to technology – another potential indicator of class – was also something that I navigated. Primarily I took notes by hand and used a small voice recorder, rather than utilizing my laptop computer. I also conducted most of my interviews in informal settings – for example, sitting at kitchen tables or on porches over a drink. This seemed to put people more at ease. While I have not lived in manufactured housing – a question I was often asked – my knowledge about this mode of housing (achieved through research and discussions with ROC USA and NHCLF staff members) helped me to ask appropriate questions. At times, however, my positionality as a younger woman seemed to offset my class privilege. Almost all of the residents I spoke to were significantly older than me, and I believe this generational difference allowed some members to be more confident that they had

knowledge worth sharing with me. This was perhaps especially true when I spoke to men in these communities. In general, though, once I was introduced, residents welcomed me and were very open to sharing their thoughts and experiences.

From my first contact with co-op members – and other interviewees – I tried to be as clear about my research as possible. Initially, I reached out to the co-op board president in each of the three communities and provided them with information about my research project. I also emphasized that I considered the research process to be an iterative one – continually informed by my discussions and experiences with respondents. Once it was clear that I was not affiliated with any of their funders, all three presidents were quite candid about the challenges they faced in their communities. They also shared my research objectives with other co-op board members and obtained permission from these collectives for me to visit. These initial contacts with what social science research refers to as 'gatekeepers,' provided me with critical "resources needed to do research" (Campbell et al., 2006:98) – including co-op documents and, most importantly, introductions to other community members.

When I initially began my research, I thought that I would end up studying how socio-spatial relations were impacted by the transition from investor-owned communities to collectively owned cooperatives. I imagined that there would be a shift in subjectivities, understanding of property relations, and development of constituent power – and that these changes might depend on the length of time the community operated as a co-op. To a certain extent, I found this to be true in the most general of terms. However, as I spent time in the communities and spoke to residents, a more complex and messy picture emerged. Regardless of how long communities had operated as cooperatives,

seeming paradoxes existed in how members understood – and participated in – the processes of co-ownership and co-management. The continual interaction of multiple subjectivities and positionalities over time and space complicated not only what it *means* for each community to be a cooperative, but also, perhaps more importantly, *how these cooperatives work* (and do not work).

In order to reveal some of the productive frictions and creative tensions involved in everyday practices, both main chapters of this thesis are largely based on the words and experiences of residents I interviewed in the three communities. I have also included moments of narration about particular events and interactions that I observed – and participated in – in order to offer a more textured context. My positionality as a researcher in the academy has allowed me the space and time to reflect on these words and experiences, while also acknowledging my outsider status to these communities.[9] I do not aim to speak for or through anyone other than myself. Instead, I see this research as a means (one of many) of facilitating a dialogue between specific-embedded (and embodied) knowledges inside and outside the academy. In part, this comes from my recognition – along with other feminist geographers – that the representation of research is in itself a production of knowledge – and therefore political (Pulsipher 1997; Cope 2002). In other words, decisions about how and to whom, research results are (re)presented in this thesis are "epistemologically significant" (Cope 2002:52).

Toward this end, I have structured this thesis project with multiple audiences in mind. First, I aim to speak to (and with) manufactured housing cooperative members – as well as related advocates and stakeholders. Thus, the first chapter is written along the

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[9] Although as Katz (1994:67) argues, a researcher is never completely an 'insider' or 'outsider' – as she/he is simultaneously present in a number of 'fields.'

lines of a white paper and is meant to be more accessible to a wider audience – beyond the academy. I see this as operating amid a tradition in feminist and radical geography (Sangtin Writers and R. Nagar 2006; Gibson-Graham 2011) where academics have attempted to ensure that the benefits of research are not simply “limited to those within the academy or perhaps wider government policy environments,” but that they also serve other ‘publics’ – including those people involved in the research (Koster et al. 2012:200). The second chapter, while speaking to a more academic audience, also has praxical implications. I have sought to utilize theoretical language, in this case, not only as an analytical instrument, but also as a “tool for change” (Feminist Pedagogy Working Group 2002:77) with practical applications. In both chapters then, my intention is to speak to (and across) multiple bodies of knowledges, including those of the academic and practitioner spheres. Operating in a ‘space of betweenness’ (Katz 1994), then, I seek to use this thesis project as a means of bringing these knowledges into productive dialogue.

Project(s)

In his 2005 article – “Remember property?” – Nick Blomley challenges geographers to once again ‘take property seriously’ and to critically (re)consider the normative model of capitalist ownership. It is not only that this mode of operating is generally taken for granted that makes this scrutiny important, he argues, but also that it maintains a powerful hold on “our understandings of the possibilities of social life, the ethics of human relations and the ordering of economic life” (Blomley 2005:125). Forms of collective property have received relatively little attention by geographers – particularly those working in the Western world (Brown 2007:508). Where there has

been geographic work, it has largely focused on the "indeterminacy and situatedness of private property" (Brown 2007: 508 and Rose, 1994), or on the ways that collective claims to land are explicit assertions of community entitlement (Bromley 2002, 2004; Mitchell 2003; Brown 2007). There has been little attention to the "messier, everyday underbelly of collective property in which the micro-resolution of rights within the bound of collective entitlement are struggled over" (Brown, 2007: 508). However, as the underlying precarity of current propertarian relations has been dramatically laid bare in the 2008 housing crisis and the corresponding economic downturn, there is, perhaps, an opening for geographers to (re)examine alternative propertarian relations and new claims to collective space.

It is in this opening that the chapters of this thesis grapple with the emergence and details of collective ownership in the midst of 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner & Theodore 2002). While the two chapters are each designed to stand alone – with the intention of eventually submitting them for publication – together they offer a broader analysis of propertarian and socio-spatial issues operating in some manufactured housing cooperatives. The first chapter, "From Crisis to Cooperative: Expressing a Collective Right to Shared Equity and Governance in Manufactured Housing Communities," considers converging social, political and economic relations within manufactured housing cooperatives. Here, I highlight the opportunities of, and challenges to, this ownership model in the midst of what might be considered a housing affordability – or even housing privatization – crisis. Specifically in this chapter, I consider how the members of three manufactured housing communities are exerting their (collective) right to housing, negotiating the relationship between private and shared equity, and

developing a culture of democratic governance. This chapter was written with the intention of submitting it to a nonacademic journal.

Along with a renewed interest in property in general, there is also recently more attention to 'the commons' in the geographic literature. Much of this discourse tends to be framed in terms of defending against the enclosures of neoliberal globalization (Blomley 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Ferguson 2006; Vasudevan et al. 2008), where the commons have become a reactive rather than a proactive category. However, some geographers are starting to (re)imagine the commons as "generative spacing," (Jeffrey et al. 2012:1249; Bresnihan & Byrne forthcoming). In this vision, rather than a static and bounded space or resource, the commons is an active process of *spacing* or continually reconceptualizing space, place and social relations. It is this *commoning* – or "doing" of the commons (Linebaugh 2008) – and what it means for the everyday production of socio-spatial relations that I explore in the second chapter, "Beyond Tragedy: Differential commoning in a manufactured housing cooperative." Specifically, I consider one manufactured housing cooperative as an enactment of 'an actually existing commons,' (Eizenberg 2012). In doing so, I highlight elements of the nitty-gritty, essential relations that are constantly being (re)negotiated in this particular commons. This allows me to reframe the commons as a space of complex becoming and seemingly paradoxical relations. The struggle to collectivize in this instance, I suggest, illustrates the need for situated engagements with commoning practices – particularly within the context of multifaceted socio-economic concerns, unsmoothly circulating knowledges and shifting relations to property – rather than investigations operating within the rigidity of economic rationality or the homogeneity of some imagined community. In this context, I consider

the possibility of *differential commoning* and how this set of practices might contribute to political mobilization and alternative modes of social reproduction. This chapter was written with the intention of submitting it to *Antipode*.

These chapters offer only a partial view into collective ownership in manufactured housing cooperatives, and there is much more that can be written – both in regard to these specific communities and to models of collective ownership and commoning in general. I hope that this project will initiate further discussions with academics and practitioners alike. Therefore, in addition to seeking publication of the chapters of this thesis, I also plan to share my research with the members of the co-ops represented in this thesis as well as the members of the ROC USA network.

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From Crisis to Cooperative: Resident Owned Communities

I. Introduction

Housing affordability has long been a critical issue in the United States. Since the 1960s it has continually been the largest single household expenditure, and the gap between what people can afford and its ballooning costs continues to expand (Pattillo 2013:512). The financial crisis in 2008 – compounded by an increasingly complex and predatory housing market – exacerbated the situation. Today, a full-time employee working at the minimum wage – in any U.S. state – cannot afford a "fair market rent" two-bedroom apartment (518). As a result, many people in lower income households and communities of color are paying more than thirty percent of their pre-tax income toward the cost of shelter. For those who own their homes, unforeseen loss of income makes these "cost-burdened"[10] households more vulnerable to foreclosure, eviction and homelessness. When over half a million people in the U.S. experienced homelessness in 2012, there were almost 18 million vacant housing units across the country – figures that reinforce arguments that the real issue is one of housing unaffordability rather than a lack in the supply of housing (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2013; US Census Bur. 2012; Pattillo 2013:516).

Figure 1. Manufactured home for sale.

[10] Michael Stone (1993:32) challenges this conventional standard of housing affordability, which posits that every household can afford up to a fixed percentage of their income for housing. Instead, he offers the concept of "shelter poverty," which uses a "sliding scale of affordability" that takes into account differences in household composition and income. But his measures of shelter poverty show similar increases in the unaffordability of housing.

It is in the context of this “affordability crisis” (Davis 2006:6) that activists and residents in many communities are beginning to question the ability of the private market to provide affordable housing. They are also increasingly expressing reservations about the viability of ‘the dream’ of individual homeownership that subprime mortgage lenders have exploited to get people into homes, but not to keep people in them.[11] By refusing to leave their foreclosed homes, organizing mass resistance to evictions, campaigning to end homelessness and experimenting with alternative forms of collective ownership, residents and housing advocates “are blazing a new trail of property resistance" (Dobbz 2012:4), and, in the process, are considering new economic futures. While critical activists and academics have offered multiple alternatives for urban contexts (Stone 1993; Rameau 2008; Dobbz 2012; Tighe and Mueller 2013), there has been less attention to those in rural areas. For the purposes of this paper, I examine several experiments with one such alternative – the manufactured housing cooperative (co-op), also known as a resident owned community (ROC) – that provides an important affordable housing option for rural residents and may also offer a way to reframe ‘the dream’ in a way that empowers rather than exploits people.

Often overlooked by policymakers and housing advocates, manufactured homes or ‘mobile homes’ offer a critical source of affordable housing in the rural areas of the United States. Having evolved from the automobile industry and recreational trailers, these homes currently include a wide spectrum of housing styles. The formal designation of “manufactured home” relates to whether the unit was built before or after the implementation in 1976 of the Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards

[11] In fact, a 2005 study found that only 47% of first-time, low-income homebuyers remained homeowners five years after buying a market-rate home (Reid 2005 in Davis 2006:9).

Act or the "HUD Code," the regulatory code for constructing new 'manufactured' homes. One-fifth of all occupied manufactured homes were built before the Code, and tend to be smaller and less safe than more recent models (HAC 2011: 3-4). Regardless of the age of their home, many people have adopted this term due to the stigma associated with 'trailer' and 'mobile home,' including associations with rural poverty and backwardness. Many manufactured homes are located in 'parks' or communities where residents pay a 'lot rent' to a landlord. While "technically" mobile, once established in a community the homes are difficult to move due to the prohibitive cost of relocating.

Thus, if the landlord decides to sell the land, residents frequently find it extremely difficult to move their homes into a new community. This threat of eviction has inspired some manufactured housing residents to form cooperatives and collectively purchase the land. While it is still a relatively new phenomenon in many parts of the United States, an increasing number of manufactured housing communities are forming cooperatives, and there are now over one hundred and forty ROCs located across the country. Due to the localized nature of these communities, instead of attempting to collect data across a broad swath of ROCs, in this paper, I chose to concentrate on the complex and differential microcosms of three manufactured housing cooperatives – known here as 'Blue Lake Cooperative,' 'Pine Ridge Cooperative,' and 'Green Acres Estates.' This focused study allows for a more grounded exploration of the challenges to and opportunities of this locally based model of collective ownership. Instead of drawing comparisons across the three communities, in the following three sections, I examine illustrative examples from each co-op that speak to broader, underlying themes.

The decision to include these three specific ROCs in this research depended on a couple of factors. Primarily, they were chosen as case studies because each represents a different stage of development in the cooperative process – Pine Ridge organized as a co-op over twenty years ago, Blue Lake has been a co-op for just over five years, and Green Acres only recently formed a ROC.[12] But the members of these communities are also all negotiating a number of localized issues that highlight thematic trajectories. The second section considers how, in forming the first ROC in Wisconsin, the residents of Green Acres are navigating the complexity and uncertainty involved in undertaking a new collective endeavor, expressing their *collective* right to adequate, affordable housing, and ultimately offering a different vision for secure tenancy. Section three and four focus on two co-ops in New Hampshire – the state with a significant precedent for these types of co-ops and the greatest number of ROCs in the country (over one hundred). Section three examines how members of Pine Ridge understand and interact with the cooperative's principle of sharing equity, amid persisting notions of individual property and private ownership. Then, section four looks at the small community of Blue Lake, where preexisting tensions among members and a lack of broad participation in the co-op are challenging the development of contingent power. It would be impossible to unravel all the ideas, interests, and practices woven into each of these unique contexts. The case studies considered in this research reveal a select set of key issues related to collectively organizing and managing manufactured housing cooperatives. In the conclusion I then aim to offer broader insights into the potential of this model to not only provide

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[12] At the time this research was conducted, the community was just in the final stages of purchasing the land as a cooperative.

affordable housing in the rural areas United States, but also to create a basis for more general socio-economic change on a local level.

II. 'Green Acres Estates': Redefining housing as a collective right

On the outskirts of Kenosha, Wisconsin, off a busy road and tucked behind a car lot and furniture warehouse, I find the unassuming entrance to Green Acres Estates – a manufactured housing community whose residents recently organized as a cooperative. Driving in the entrance and winding through the neighborhood, I locate the 'park office.' I walk in looking for 'Greg' – a resident and co-organizer of the cooperative effort. In response to my request, the woman at the desk looks me over and then tells me that, 'this isn't the place for that cooperative-thing.' If I want to find Greg, I'll probably find him at home. It is only later, when I speak with Greg, that I learn that that the office is owned and operated by the previous owner of the community and his family, and that there has been some contention throughout the purchase negotiation process that transfers ownership into the hands of the residents.

Green Acres Estates began in the 1970s as an RV camping site. But as more and more people began to stay, the owner of the land decided to develop it into a manufactured housing community. Residents moved in, agreeing to the rules and monthly lot rent set by the owner – both of which were subject to frequent change over the years. The owner (referred to as 'the warden' by some residents) is said to have engaged in practices common in such investor-owned communities – arbitrary rent hikes, "creative bookkeeping," and neglected infrastructure. The fact that many manufactured housing residents in this community owned their homes, but rented space to locate them,

meant that they often found themselves trapped, unable to move their homes and "susceptible to outside forces, susceptible to rate hikes and whatever whimsical things that [the owner] used to come up with."[13] As one long-term resident of Green Acres Estates describes it: "You've got no rights at all – you don't own the land, you're stuck! You don't have a say in anything."[14] Finding the policies of the owner to be intolerable, Greg at one point had looked into relocating his home, but found that it would cost him $11,000 just to move it, and more to find another spot to locate it. The ever-present fear of displacement and the lack of control over their own shelter thus undermined Green Acres residents' right to adequate and affordable housing.

So, when a few years ago the owner decided to sell the land, residents resolved to join together to purchase the land. "What we're thinking is that we'll be able to secure our future," Greg tells me.[15] With technical assistance from a couple of nonprofits, the residents of Green Acres began a yearlong process of organizing as a cooperative. This involved knocking on a lot of doors, starting conversations with neighbors in backyards, and coordinating regular community-wide meetings. The process of organizing a cooperative in Green Acres was, in the words of one community member, "arduous and long, but very rewarding in the end. […] It's been quite a learning experience to see how people come together."[16] While the specifics of the cooperative model were new to most residents and the idea of collectively managing such a large resource was a novel one, the promise of secure housing now and in the future persuaded many Green Acre residents to

[13] Interview K1, 06.17.13.

[14] Interview K6, 08.04.13.

[15] Interview K1, 06.17.13.

[16] Interview K8, 08.04.13.

join the cooperative effort. As another member of the cooperative describes it: "It was a very scary process – going in there and not knowing what to do, [having] never done this before. But everyone put in extra effort to try and understand."[17] Ultimately, they perceived that a co-op "undermines the risk of displacement" by putting the fate of the community under "direct resident control."[18]

Secure tenure and resident control are critical elements in addressing the precarity and insecurity associated with the current marketization of housing. The general assumption in the U.S. – across the political spectrum – that the market should be the primary provider of all housing, combined with the reduction of subsidized housing over the years, has contributed to a housing affordability crisis (Stone 1993:8). During the 1970s and 80s, a lot of the subsidized rental housing was lost as private owners prepaid their loans and converted the subsidized housing into higher-rent market-rate housing (Wiener 2006:171). From 1972-1986 over a thousand Rural Housing Service (RHS) Section 515 rural rental-housing loans were paid off by private owners, and these units – originally built and government subsidized to serve elderly and low-income tenants – became wholly privatized and largely unaffordable (Ibid.). Since the 1980s, the U.S. government has largely turned to the private market for solutions to affordable housing issues, and there has been almost no direct federal funding for supplying low-income housing (Sazama 2000:599).

The decline in the availability of federally subsidized housing is one of the reasons that the number of cost-burdened households – paying more than thirty percent of

[17] Interview K7, 08.04.13.

[18] Interview N1, 06.17.13.

their pre-tax income for housing[19] – has grown substantially in recent years. The burden of housing costs means that, in comparison with similar households living in affordable housing, severely cost-burdened low-income families – who pay more than half of their pre-tax income for housing – spend almost two-thirds as much on food, half as much on clothing, one-fifth as much on health care and half as much on pensions and retirement (JCHS 2013). In recognizing the critical role housing plays in people's lives – impacting their health, safety, economic opportunities and security, social relations and identities – a number of scholars, practitioners and activists are reframing housing as a fundamental *right* rather than a commodity (Stone 1993; Bratt et al. 2006; Marcuse and Keating 2006). They argue that an enactment of a 'Right to Housing' – as originally set forth as a goal in the Housing Act of 1949 to provide "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family" – could "go a long way toward countering the pernicious trend toward our society's extremes of material well-bring and opportunity" (Marcuse and Keating 2006:139; Bratt et al. 2006:1).

In conceiving of housing as a right, community activists and organizers are experimenting with and implementing important alternatives to the current market system (Stone 1993:192). Shared equity housing – including manufactured housing cooperatives or resident owned communities (ROCs) like Green Acres Estates – transforms housing from an "expensive commodity into an affordable social entitlement," and provides modes of ownership and tenure that have proved particularly resilient in the midst of economic uncertainty and government funding cutbacks (Stone 1993:192; Davis 2013

[19] Michael Stone (1993:32) challenges this conventional standard of housing affordability, which posits that every household can afford up to a fixed percentage of their income for housing. Instead, he offers the concept of "shelter poverty," which uses a "sliding scale of affordability" that takes into account differences in household composition and income. But his measures of shelter poverty show similar increases in the unaffordability of housing.

[2010]:187). Situated within a 'middle ground' between public and private ownership, shared equity homeownership restructures the "owner's interest" to more greatly align individual and community interests, providing a long-term and collective "stewardship regime" (Ibid.; Davis 2006:1). The nonmarket tenures of shared equity housing offer the rewards of homeownership, while also ensuring the preservation of affordably priced, quality housing, and safeguarding against future gentrification that could result in the displacement of lower income residents.[20] Arguably, the model is different from much of the affordable housing policy in the U.S., which has primarily focused on promoting *individual* homeownership through 'creative' mortgage devices, the removal of credit barriers, lower down payments and adjustable rates to increase access to market-rate single-family homes. I would make the case, modifying the original 'Right to Housing,' that shared equity housing is not only an articulation of an individual right, but also the expression of a *collective* right to housing.

In everyday parlance, the discussion of rights in the U.S. tends towards the rights of the individual, rather than the collective. Perhaps nowhere is this so explicit than in the tenets and mythology around *private* property. The individual family house with a white picket fence remains a strong imaginary in the U.S., and is present among residents of Green Acres. While looking forward to escaping the landlord-renter relationship, many members of Green Acres still discuss cooperative ownership as secondary or second-best in a hierarchy of property relations: co-ownership is a step up from renting, but a step down from private property. And yet, in discussing the transition to co-ownership, members discuss the project in terms of "we" – what the benefits are to the community

[20] Affordability is preserved by limiting the amount of equity an individual can accumulate – usually according to a set formula. This is discussed more in the following section.

rather than themselves as individuals. For instance, when asked what ‘resident ownership’ meant to her personally, ‘Carol,’ an older widowed resident, told me: “We are in control of our own destiny for a change. […] We want to feel secure. We feel that now; we want to stay that way.”[21] Empowerment here is experienced and expressed collectively.

It was this active exercising of a collective right – as well as an accompanying sense of community empowerment – that was palpable at the Green Acres Estates picnic four days after the community legally became a cooperative. There was much excitement and relief amongst the new co-op members as they put out dishes of pasta salad and barbeque. Members had been preparing for this moment for the past month – painting benches, laying bricks for a patio, weed-whacking and planting flowers. They wanted to make the community look nice for when it was finally *their* community. As the first resident owned manufactured housing community in Wisconsin, the residents had a sense that they were part of something historic, even as they acknowledged the difficulty and anxiety in undertaking the new collective endeavor. Some members expressed the hope that resident ownership would “become the model for [Wisconsin], because there’s a lot of people that actually [could] benefit from it,”[22] and have begun to speak with their friends and family living in nearby manufactured housing communities. The collective right to housing thus has the potential to extend beyond the bounds of a singular

Figure 2. Cake from 'Green Acres Estates' Co-op picnic.

[21] Interview K9, 08.04.13.
[22] Interview K1, 06.17.13.

community even as it currently remains fixed within an imagined hierarchy of property rights and relations.

III. 'Pine Ridge Co-op': Sharing equity now and in the future

During his tenure as Pine Ridge Cooperative's board president, 'Jeff' has used a number of different metaphors to describe to outsiders – and some coop members who still struggle with the concepts – what co-ownership and shared equity mean. "I give the example all the time of going out and buying a brand new car," he tells me. "[A]nd the only thing that you ever do is sweep the trash off the driver's seat, because that's all you use – the rest of it you just let fall apart."[23] If members are just "taking care of their little part of [the co-op]," and are not sharing responsibility for the entire community, then the cooperative will not sustain and build equity – nor, by extension, will individual members. For Jeff it is thus about redefining ownership for both existing and new co-op members – "You own a share of [the cooperative's] eight acres, not just a fifty [foot] by one hundred [foot] piece."[24]

It has been over twenty years since the community became resident owned. During this time, the seventy cooperative member households that make up Pine Ridge have been working and struggling together to figure out what it means to collectively own and manage the community. And it has not been easy. They have had to navigate personal conflicts, financial issues, divergences between personal and collective interests, and reluctance among some residents to embrace change. Jeff is a long time resident of Pine Ridge, and in recent years, especially since retiring, he has taken on more

[23] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

[24] The measurement of the space allotted to each household in Pine Ridge.

responsibility in the management of the community. In describing his role as an active co-op member, Jeff says, “there’s no quitting.” A key part of his position as board president, from his perspective, is to get other Pine Ridge residents “in the correct mindset, [so that they] understand that this isn't a six month commitment, or a two week commitment or in our case even a twenty year commitment. This is a lifetime commitment to a cooperative style of life.”[25] The collective sense of responsibility that Jeff hopes all members will ultimately espouse is one that not only extends to current members, but also to future generations of residents.

The shared value is that embodied within the Pine Ridge community depends on the collective action and investment of its members. While market-rate housing "tilts heavily toward the individual, directing most of the benefits of residential property toward those who are fortunate enough to own it," shared or limited equity housing[26] – like that of Pine Ridge co-op – acknowledges that a property’s value is only partially due to an individual’s personal investment (Davis 2006:4). Its value is also derived from the “wealth of the community” (Mill 1848 quoted in Davis 2013 [2010]:188), which includes the larger community’s investment – the infrastructure, schools, available public services and job opportunities. In recognition of this shared wealth, when residents move out of shared equity housing they can only claim the equity created through their personal investment in the community, which is defined using a predetermined formula.[27] The remaining value, or “wealth of the community,” is then preserved in the property,

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[25] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

[26] Shared equity homeownership is also referred to as ‘limited equity,’ ‘nonspeculative,’ and ‘third sector’ housing. However, National Housing Institute (NHI) changed the name to ‘shared equity’ to focus on what homeowners shared, rather than what they gave up (Davis 2013 [2010]:188).

[27] There are four generic formulas: indexed formulas, itemized formulas, appraisal-based formulas and mortgage-based formulas (Davis 2006:24).

keeping the housing affordable for future generations. This "intergenerational sharing of wealth" is a key mechanism for bringing the present and future "interests of individuals into closer alignment with the interests of community" (Davis 2013 [2010]:189; Davis 2006:4).

As a nonprofit, this notion of "sharing of wealth" is also structured into the cooperative model. Pine Ridge specifically offers and invests in housing for low-income families.[28] If there is more than one prospective new member, and after background and credit checks all things are equal between candidates, the co-op board must offer membership to the applicant with the lowest income. While this practice can at times create challenges for the community if the new member struggles to afford to stay in the co-op, the board has often been able to leverage collective resources in order to underwrite some residents during particularly tough economic times to prevent them from going into default – "taking some of the earned money [of the coop] and investing it [back into] residents."[29] Ultimately, as Jeff says, it is about figuring out how the cooperative can "make it so that people come into [Pine Ridge] and succeed." After all, "[t]here is no sense in somebody moving in and moving right back out again… once they sign the occupancy agreement they're part of the family."[30]

However, the fact that residents in resident owned communities such as Pine Ridge often individually own their own homes, means that individual and collective property relations and interests coexist – and at times come into conflict. This makes

[28] The eligibility of prospective LEC members is also generally determined by household income, so that it does not exceed a specified percentage of the Area Median Income (AMI) for a particular geographic region – usually ranging from 150% of AMI to 60% AMI (Davis 2006:56).

[29] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

[30] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

ROCs different from other forms of shared equity housing, because many "people are starting with equity" (ROC USA 06.17). This provides unique challenges as well as opportunities. On the one hand, the residents are arguably *more* invested in the community since they have a personal financial stake in improving their community. Creating a cooperative tends, for example, to end the "equity-stripping" of investor-owned communities, where the owner can raise rents, add fees and threaten to evict residents – all of which drive down the value of individual homes.[31] On the other hand, the dual ownership structure has the potential to create some confusion about, and dissonance over, the role of the cooperative when individual and shared interests are not perceived to be in alignment. "You haven't lived until you walk up on someone's porch and they come out and they say, you get the hell off my lot and don't come back," Jeff says as he recalls some of his efforts as the co-op board president to engage other members. "And you have to tell them, 'I'm sorry but where is your lot? I don't see it. I see [Pine Ridge's] land. If you don't want me on your porch, fine.'"[32]

In this comment, Jeff flags up an inconsistency in the perspectives on property among members of Pine Ridge – a theme that emerged in other members' comments as well. Even as members of the co-op are intimately entangled in collective social and economic relations – co-owning and co-managing (even if only implicitly) the land – notions of private property persist and at times, as Jeff's story illustrates, come into conflict with the cooperative model. Since the porch is part of the individual member's manufactured home, the space is technically private property. Members individually

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[31] Although some tax assessors continue to value manufactured homes simply on how old the home is, like a car – regardless of the ownership model or quality of the home – essentially using a 'blue book approach' (NHCLF1 07.09).

[32] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

invest in improving their homes – painting, adding flower boxes and sometimes building an extension – since it is often their greatest personal asset. And yet, the land on which the home is sited is co-owned by all the members of the cooperative, and is part of the collective assets of the community. On a day-to-day basis then, residents are navigating the discursive and physical borders of both individual and collective formations of property that exist simultaneously in Pine Ridge, even though they are seemingly in contradiction (constituting what Rose 1993 might call a 'paradoxical space'). Conflicts thus inevitably emerge when there is a clash in perspective. As described in the scenario above, one member appears to consider the site of his home to be his property due to its association with his privately owned home, while Jeff understands the line between private and collective property to be the end of the porch.

The differing notions of property in Pine Ridge have implications for how members understand what it means to share equity. Many members of Pine Ridge that I spoke to, believe that, at the very least, throwing their lot in together as a cooperative has secured or improved their personal equity. Indeed, as shown in a report by the *Carsey Institute*, resident owned communities offer several economic advantages for their individual members over their investor-owned counterparts, including: lower monthly fees, higher average home sales prices, faster home sales, and access to fixed rate home financing (Ward et al. 2006:1). In general then, contrary to the objections of some private market advocates who argue that it infringes on private property rights and prevents households from building wealth (Davis 2006:1), shared equity housing offers a way for people to individually accumulate wealth that is generally competitive with private

homeownership[33] – except for those in highly speculative housing markets (Stone 1993:195). Nonetheless, if at some point the market value of the cooperative's shares grows substantially greater than the formula-set price, members can decide collectively to amend the bylaws in order to become a market-rate cooperative and do away with affordability requirements.[34]

Some members, who tend to be active board members, seem to have a broader vision of what it means to share equity – one that is embedded in the possibilities of collective ownership both inside and outside Pine Ridge. Not only has the current co-op board taken on a policy of supporting members through difficult economic times, but they also decided to invest in future resident owned communities elsewhere. Recently, the Pine Ridge co-op board decided to "put [their] money where [their] mouth is," and invest some of the cooperative's money in New Hampshire Community Loan Fund (NHCLF). NHCLF, in turn, will loan this money out to other manufactured housing communities that are forming new ROCs. As Jeff succinctly states: "We're a cooperative and we believe in the cooperative concept, and that's probably where we should invest our money."[35] Yet, as shown in this section, this 'we' is not a unified one. Instead, it incorporates a variety of differing, and at times contradictory, perspectives on what it means to share property and equity, and how to relate individual and collective interests.

[33] In fact, it is only in the past decade that people have assumed that there would necessarily be property appreciation above increases in consumer price (Davis 2006:1) – although the recent housing crisis has somewhat eroded this assumption.

[34] There are certain contractual restrictions that inhibit this possibility, including mortgage agreements on the land, which often last at least thirty years. Arguably the only way to ensure that that affordability is maintained 'in perpetuity' is to develop a shared-equity cooperative on land leased from a community land trust (CLT), which takes the decision to become a market-rate co-op out of members' hands.

Some shared equity advocates have been considering combining the CLT model with that of a shared equity cooperative as a means maintaining affordable cooperative housing in the long-term (Davis 2006).

[35] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

IV. Cultivating a space for collective governance in 'Blue Lake Co-op'

It is hot and crowded in the small one-room community center and 'Steve' – the current board president of this manufactured housing cooperative – is worried that there might not be enough chairs. A couple of fans rotate in the corner, but are ultimately turned off, as they are more effective at drowning out voices than providing much relief from the summer heat. It is the Blue Lake Cooperative's fifth annual membership meeting and people are tense. Past meetings have been contentious and the current agenda contains several items that are likely to elicit strong feelings from members. There is a vote for a refinancing plan, which will reduce the community's overall monthly payment but not necessarily individual monthly payments; several board positions are open for nomination due to some recent resignations – both voluntary and involuntary (one board member was asked to leave for alleged improper conduct); and there is, of course, the ongoing discussion about what to do with the community's commercial property. "I'm worried about [the meeting] […] I'm anticipating the worst," one co-op board member told me the day before. Given the precedent sent in prior meetings, he worries that this gathering will "turn into a shouting match."[36]

Yet, despite their anxiety, the three remaining board members sit calmly at the front of the room as people shuffle chairs to make room for newcomers. Steve begins the meeting with an update on the status of the community, and a reminder to everyone in the room that they all share the responsibility to make the cooperative work and succeed. After all, he asserts, 'This is not a landlord-tenant relationship!' After voting on a few

[36] Interview L2, 07.20.13.

minor changes to the community's bylaws – or 'housekeeping,' as Steve refers to it – the issue of the budget and refinancing is carefully broached and discussed. The unease in the room is evident as people raise concerns about how refinancing the community's loan might affect their personal, often strict, budgets. However, after a thorough – and at times heated – discussion, people raise colored index cards to indicate their approval or disapproval, and the measure passes by a healthy margin.[37]

The next item is the question of the co-op's commercial property – a rental house (which was the home of the previous owner of the community) and a large, rather run-down garage. While these properties serve as a potential means of subsidizing the cooperative – at least in theory – their physical condition has prevented them from becoming assets. Some members are upset when they learn that the board unilaterally decided to lower the rent for the current tenant and make repairs to the house, which is at least twice, if not three times as large as co-op members' homes. After long being tenants themselves, members of Blue Lake now find themselves in the role of the landlord – a seemingly uncomfortable position for some in the co-op who do not wish to repeat the practices of their previous landlord and are yet concerned about their own financial future. Ultimately members recognize that the repairs were necessary due to some possible health hazards for the tenants, but members assert that in the future they

Figure 3. Blue Lake Co-op's commercial garage

[37] Shared equity cooperatives operate according to the principle of one-household, one-vote, as opposed to market-rate cooperatives, which assign votes based on the number and value of shares an individual household maintains (Davis 2006:24).

should be consulted before collective funds are allocated. In the end, the membership votes to have the board get estimates of the cost to fix up the garage before spending any more capital improvement funds on the commercial properties. The issue is settled and the mood lightens as two new co-op members, who recently joined the community, volunteer to fill empty board positions, and are elected unanimously with great enthusiasm.

This seemingly simple display of democratic process reflects the efforts of Blue Lake members over the last five years to develop a constructive deliberative environment and a productive method of making decisions. While this might seem insignificant or unimpressive to those accustomed to being listened to and not threatened or shouted at, for residents in Blue Lake, the fact that people can now "speak up [in meetings] and no one will come beat them up in the backyard," is noteworthy.[38] By all accounts, it has been a challenging journey for the cooperative, which formed during the height of the global financial crisis when anxieties over affordable housing and personal finances were particularly acute. There has been a lot of turnover on the board, personal conflicts amongst members, many contentious membership meetings, an ongoing debate about absentee ownership (several members only live in the community for part of the year, spending the winter months in warmer climates), and a constant fear of increasing costs.[39] Therefore, many residents came to the July membership meeting "really hot" and

[38] Interview L5, 07.21.13.

[39] Forming a cooperative meant that residents' monthly housing costs went up 37% over night, since they had to buy the land for a 1.6 million dollars with no equity down. While the cooperative has since kept this amount stable, it stretched many residents' budgets. Eighty percent of the monthly housing payments go towards the mortgage (Interview L2, 07.20.13).

"prepared for a fight." However, much to everyone's surprise "the fight was taken out"[40] and people generally seemed to leave the meeting relieved and proud of their ability to collectively discuss difficult issues and negotiate compromises.

The laborious process of decision-making in the collective management of shared resources, such as in the democratic management of a cooperative, is an essential "part of the conscious forging of a common base of understanding" (Cleaver 2000:371). It is also perhaps one reason that shared equity cooperatives tend to promote social engagement and collective action – or contingent power – more than other forms of social housing and private homeownership.[41] The principles of community organizing and economic justice are also historically embedded within the shared equity co-op model, which first emerged in the early twentieth century labor movement in the United States.[42] Holding real estate assets in common, cooperative members are obliged to make collective decisions by exercising democratic principles on a neighborhood level – voting on board members, bylaws, budget items, capital improvements, and other collective decisions. In moving away from the alienation of individual private ownership and the insecurity of renting, residents in shared equity housing face successes and challenges as a community. This increases the overall capacity of cooperative members to weather crises and improve their lives. Thus, advocates of social equity homeownership see this type of housing as "a

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[40] Interview L4, 07.21.13.

[41] Some studies have also shown that there is a connection between tenure of residential property and social participation in a neighborhood – homeowners, for example, are often more likely than renters to participate in voluntary organizations and local politics (Davis 2006:10).

[42] Labor unions initially introduced the model of socially oriented and non-speculative cooperative housing in the U.S. (Stone 1993:204). Beginning in the twentieth century, these cooperatives provided good quality and affordable housing for unionized workers.

fertile incubator of social capital" as residents are political, economically and socially "linked together in common cause" (Davis 2006:10, 7).

The development of the Blue Lake co-op certainly linked residents in 'common cause' – both in ways they anticipated and in those they did not. The manufactured housing community was initially owned and operated by a local family business for more than forty years before residents collectively organized to form a cooperative in 2008. The lakeside property, within commuting distance of the state capital, was in high demand when the family decided to put it up for sale. Worried that an investor would buy the land and turn it into a condominium complex, community members formed a cooperative and successfully outbid an outside investor with the help of New Hampshire Community Loan Fund (NHCLF), which provided technical assistance and a low-interest loan. The fear of losing their homes meant that residents "hung together," even though in the past "people [had] kept to themselves."[43] As one of the smaller manufactured housing communities in New Hampshire – containing only twenty-seven homes – Blue Lake was far from a tight-knit community when they started the process of forming a cooperative. 'Lucy,' a long-term resident who saved during her 18-year career at the phone company to buy her home in Blue Lake, admitted that it was difficult to "get people to reach out," as they were "afraid getting [their] hand chopped off. […] Before forming the co-op] we never knew our neighbors – never!"[44] But once people were "thrown in together," facing a shared fate, they began to get to know each other. Following the formation of the cooperative, residents held their first community-wide cookout in over thirty years.

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[43] Interview L5, 07.21.13.

[44] Ibid.

However, in the small, largely elderly community of Blue Lake, there are still a limited number of members who are willing and able to participate in the everyday labor of governing and maintaining the co-op. While several committees were initially set up, including membership, social, finance, and rules enforcement – with members often volunteering to participate in more than one – these quickly disappeared due to an absence of consistent committee work and dearth of regular volunteers. The current lack of broad participation means that the everyday decision-making and labor of managing the co-op has largely become centralized in Blue Lake. This has put significant pressure on the few board members to cover all necessary tasks, even if they lack the resources or skills to do so adequately. For instance, 'Fred' – the operations manager – who took over the bookkeeping when a fellow board member resigned, has been keeping all the financial records by hand since he lacks access to a computer. This has created some confusion and disorganization in the co-op's financial records – which the co-op has subsequently sought to remedy by hiring a professional bookkeeper.

The consolidation of daily decision-making in the small board has also contributed to a certain level of mistrust between the other co-op members and the board – as illustrated in the anxiety members expressed at the annual meeting over the board's spending of collective funds. Over the years, co-op board members have tried different strategies to build broader engagement and trust. For his part, Steve has produced a community newsletter to help keep members apprised of, and engaged with, what is going on with the co-op, in order to alleviate anxiety and temper the neighborhood rumor mill. But ultimately it seems as through participation in spaces of collective governance – namely the regular board, committee, and annual membership meetings – that members

of Blue Lake can actively develop ways of negotiating differences, forging collective decisions and building mutual trust.

The fact that the Blue Lake annual meeting went so smoothly is then especially important. “Without sugar coating it, self-governance is just hard work,” and creating a ‘safe space’ for this challenging work to take place is critical.[45] As used here, ‘safe space’ is not an avoidance or abolishment of conflict, but rather a space of “recognizing and negotiating social difference” and building solidarity through the process of decision-making amongst a group of people with differing, and at times conflicting, perspectives (The Roestone Collective 2014). Certainly, though, the process of developing a ‘safe space’ for collective decision-making in Blue Lake is ongoing and has, by all accounts, been slow and difficult. Lucy reflects: “People [in Blue Lake] are not used to working together. Everybody’s used to being in a cutthroat world.”[46] Members are still making sense of their relationship to, and responsibility for, the management of the co-op – which is complicated by livelihood concerns, social mistrust, and a variety of conflicting individual priorities. Active community members hope to, over time, build a culture of collective responsibility in Blue Lake and develop a broad commitment to new modes of political engagement. “[The co-op] is kind of like planting an olive grove,” Steve tells me. “You don't plant an olive grove for yourself, you don't plant it for your kids, you plant it for your grandkids.”[47]

[45] Interview N5, 07.09.13.
[46] Interview L5, 07.21.13.
[47] Interview L1, 07.20.13.

V. Conclusion: A cooperative of cooperatives

"I think little bit by little bit we're turning heads."[48]

While historically overlooked by policy makers and scholars, manufactured housing residents are experimenting with creative new ways of living and working together. In forming resident owned communities (ROCs) or manufactured housing cooperatives, residents are addressing the housing precarity and economic insecurity in their lives, by taking control of their communities and exercising their right to affordable, quality homes. Practiced as a collective right, rather than a commodity, this form of housing offers residents a means of not only sharing equity – preserving and building the wealth of their community – but also participating in the governance of the cooperative. It is thus a model of affordable housing that involves the development of collective knowledge and contingent power through everyday formal and informal interactions and activities.

Involvement in this housing model has therefore led some cooperative members to envision other ways of acting and owning together, beyond housing. In addition to the everyday management of their communities, some members are considering ways of expanding their collective knowledge and power. For example, Jeff of Pine Ridge imagines a 'co-op of co-ops' – which would be a cooperative of housing co-ops – including members of manufactured housing communities. This "super co-op" could then interface and collaborate with consumer and worker cooperatives to leverage their collective power. Members in Blue Lake are discussing the possibility of sharing tools

[48] Interview W3, 07.14.13.

and other resources,[49] so instead of having twenty-eight push mowers – one for each household – they could all share one high-quality mower. As Bob, who voluntarily removes snow from the community's streets, reflects; "We could trade off quantity for quality and work together."[50] Other coop members recognize that "the laws aren't made for a cooperative – they're made for landlords,"[51] and are beginning to advocate for changes to federal and state policies – often with the assistance of local and regional nonprofits. In doing so, they hope to improve the cooperative development process, the availability of financing for community infrastructure improvement, and access to home loans for individual cooperative members.

Despite the housing affordability crisis in the United States, the shared equity or limited equity cooperative is "[e]merging within the interstices of the system" (Stone 1993:192), and represents a creative, localized alternative to the current private housing market. It undercuts the assumption that a for-profit housing market is a given. While the broad expansion of this model is currently limited by a lack of broad economic and technical resources, as well as inadequate political support, more people are looking to the model of resident ownership as a means of fulfilling their (collective) right to housing – especially in manufactured housing communities where historically people have had a limited ability to exercise their right to safe and affordable housing. Given the centrality of the home in private and social life, shared equity cooperatives could provide the basis for, or a complement to, other shared equity and mutual aid projects such as consumer and worker cooperatives, community organizing efforts, citizen assemblies and even

[49] Pine Ridge currently has cooperatively owned tools and machinery stored in a shed that the community built together.

[50] Interview L4, 07.21.13.

[51] Interview W3, 07.14.13.

participatory budgeting. The home – in a cooperative context – thus has the potential to become the basic unit of social organizing – a grounded expression of a collective right to housing, shared equity and democratic governance.

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Beyond Tragedy: Differential commoning in a manufactured housing cooperative[52]

I. Introduction

In 'Pine Ridge' access to land is not open. You need to become a member of the manufactured housing[53] cooperative (co-op) in order to utilize this common resource, and membership is restricted. When there is a home or lot available, potential new members have to submit to background and credit checks, and agree to the rules of the community. The land of Pine Ridge is owned by a group of members, each of whom reside in the community and hold an equal share that corresponds to a proportion of the property.[54] Where the previous landlord 'governed by intimidation'[55] – summarily increasing rent and adding new rules without notice or explanation – co-owning and co-managing the land as a cooperative gives every co-op

Figure 1. Pine Ridge bulletin board and mailboxes

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[52] The data for this chapter comes from participant observation in a manufactured housing cooperative located in New Hampshire – that took place in July 2013. In addition to attending meetings and participating in informal conversations, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 cooperative members, as well as with four technical assistance providers who work with this community. All quotes in this text come from these interviews – the names of the communities as well as interviewees have been changed to protect anonymity.

[53] While manufactured homes evolved from the automobile industry and recreational travel trailers, they currently include a wide spectrum of housing styles. The designation of a "manufactured home" relates to whether the unit was built before or after June 15, 1976 when the Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards Act (or the "HUD Code") was implemented to regulate the construction of manufactured homes. Today one-fifth of occupied manufactured homes in the U.S. were built before 1975, and tend to be smaller and less safe than more recent models (George and Yankausas 2011: 3-4).

[54] As a limited-equity cooperative, members can retrieve their ownership interest once they leave the community, but the accumulation of equity on this initial investment is restricted to maintain affordability over time.

[55] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

member a secure tenancy and an equal say in how the land is maintained. In this sense, then, members of Pine Ridge can be considered 'commoners' – a specific group of people that use and manage a shared resource.

Long a historical referent of communal grazing land in 15th century England, the concept of 'the commons' has more recently been revitalized and transformed in contexts associated with a wide range of collective resources, relations and activities. From a Marxist perspective, the historical enclosure of the commons was "the starting point of capitalist society" and the basic means of 'primitive accumulation,' as workers, newly "free" from the means of reproduction, became wage laborers (Midnight Notes 1990:1). For many activists and scholars, then, the commons is a theoretical pivot in arguments over the ubiquitousness of capitalism and neoliberal invocations of 'tragedy'[56] that are employed to justify the enclosures of common resources. At the same time, the recognition and mobilization of 'actually existing commons' (Eizenberg 2012) – from the *zanjera* organization of water allocation in the Philippines to urban community gardens in the United States (Rowe 2008; Eizenberg 2012) – has become a basis from which to explore alternative socio-economic relations in pursuit of a more equitable society (see for example, onthecommons.org). Thus, a growing number of social and political movements have found the concept of 'the commons' to represent a move away from purely antagonistic politics to a more affirmative, 'prefigurative politics' (Franks 2006).

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[56] In his (in)famous 1968 article, "The Tragedy of the Commons," Garrett Hardin (1968:1244) envisions the commons as a space inherently prone to degradation and ecological exhaustion, occupied by humans "locked into a system" where they are 'compelled' to maximize their individual acquisition of resources. Government and neoliberal free-market advocates continue to evoke Hardin in their efforts to enclose common resources.

However, in the recent efforts to mobilize these 'actually existing commons' and develop a broad definition of the commons,[57] there is a tendency to smooth over the contradictions and challenges that exist across and within localized contexts. This has lead to increasing concerns about the abstract and totalizing nature of the scholarship, and calls for "thicker, more ethnographic accounts of the commons" (Blomley 2008:320; McCay and Jentoft 1998), that take into account the "plurality of beliefs, norms and interests" and "the effects of complex variations in culture and society" (Prakash 1998:168 quoted in Johnson 2004:421). Such an analytical approach demands not only the recognition of differences that exist across the category of the commons (acknowledging that each instance of the commons is context-specific), but also an examination of the internal differentiation within each localized commons. After all, the commons is "both produced in and productive of a particular place" (Blomley 2008:320), encompassing the variable socio-spatial relations involved in the everyday 'doing' of the commons – or *commoning* (Linebaugh 2008).

This approach is perhaps particularly important when considering instances of the commons that exist outside a self-identified, politicized activist milieu. Pine Ridge members, for example, tend not to use the language of the commons and some are even uncomfortable with the word 'cooperative' due to the perceived 'leftist' associations. However, mindful that tensions can appear between the ideological discourses of commoning and its everyday enactments, this paper explores the 'nitty-gritty' elements of

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[57] While there is no unifying definition of 'the commons,' it has been tentatively described as "the collective and local ownership of land, resources, or ideas, held in an often communal manner, *sometimes in opposition to private property*" (Holder and Flessas 2008:300, emphasis added). The commons are often described as a 'third force' that can challenge the traditional binaries of the individual and society, the state and the market, potentially offer "a coherent alternative model for bringing economic, social, and ethical concerns into greater alignment" at various geographic scales (Bollier 2007:29).

collectively managing resources in Pine Ridge, as a means of addressing the question: *how* do 'actually existing commons' work in this localized context?[58] This perspective calls for an analytics that is attuned to the fundamental, practical and often messy details of the commons, in order to illuminate the productive frictions and unexpected alternatives that exist amongst normative socio-spatial relations.

To begin this analysis and to provide a grounded context for further inquiry, the second section considers some of the shared resources in Pine Ridge within the framework of the commons. While at first glance 'the commons' of Pine Ridge appears to be the community's shared land, arguably there is a *set* of material (land, water) and immaterial (knowledge, debt) common resources that coexist, and are often co-constituted. This section examines some of these commons in order to reveal persistent frictions in the discourses around property and ownership that impact how co-op members engage with these resources, and with each other. Given that 'actually existing commons' exist amid 'actually existing neoliberalism' as well as "complex livelihood concerns and priorities" (Cleaver 2000:362), the commons of Pine Ridge are spaces of contestation and contradiction. The nitty-gritty commoning involved in developing and managing these overlapping (im)material commons is inevitably complicated by the differing subject positions of the members of Pine Ridge – varying experiences, identities, beliefs, and interests. This complexity and tension seems to manifest in uneven participation in commoning activities – where a few willing and able members undertake the majority of the physical and intellectual labor involved in managing the commons. It

[58] Following the tendency of Deleuze and Guattari (2009, [1977]) to address questions of use (how does it work) rather than meaning (what does it mean).

is this uneven commoning, and some of the implications for the community, that I explore in section three.

Finally, in section four, I consider how this 'uneven commoning' contributes to and complicates the discussions in the commons literature over the appropriate means of managing the commons resources. Specifically, I examine two possible readings of the nitty-gritty commoning in Pine Ridge based on the literature – first, as a breakdown of management structures, and second, as an absence of specific socio-political imaginaries. However, I turn to an alternative reading of this nitty-gritty analysis, in which uneven commoning is reflective of a mode of *differential commoning* – where individual commoners engage with shared resources and each other in differing ways and to varying degrees. This perspective seems to ask for a model of community organizing around the commons that recognizes, allows for, and even embraces differences among individuals, while weaving these threads together into a flexible collective project. By allowing for different kinds of engagement with the commons and other commoners, differential commoning also has the possibility to support broad-based narratives of and experiments with alternative socio-spatial relations and economic futures. I end this paper, then, by offering a "specific theory" of differential commoning, lodged in the space between empiricism and universalism (Galison 2004), which may ultimately be a politically mobilizing model for 'actually existing commons.'

II. Pine Ridge as an 'actually existing commons'

Manufactured housing cooperatives are generally formed in a moment of crisis, when the owner of the property decides to sell her/his holdings, and residents are faced

with either displacement (frequently resulting in the loss of their not-so-mobile homes) or new management (often accompanied with an increase in rent and changes in policy). Seizing upon a third option, over twenty years ago the residents in the manufactured housing community of Pine Ridge organized to form a co-op. While in most states, owners are not obligated to offer residents the opportunity to buy them out, New Hampshire law gives manufactured housing community residents the ‘first right of refusal’ – meaning that the owner must give residents a chance to purchase the land (and other related assets) before selling to other potential buyers. Therefore, in 1993, with the assistance of a low-interest loan and technical support from the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund (NHCLF), Pine Ridge co-op members collectively bought the land underneath their homes. A principle commons is then the eight acres of land on which the seventy-two homes are located, each arranged on a fifty-by-one hundred-foot plot set along one of four tidy streets. This commons includes not only sites for individual residences, but spaces of shared community life – streets where children play, paths to walk dogs, and a community hall where meetings and social events are held.

Figure 2. Pine Ridge community hall.

The community hall, an unassuming building that easily blends in amongst the rows of homes, is always open for residents to escape the heat in the summer and cold in the winter – or to catch a football game on the television set. This hall was built by community members who recognized, after initially holding meeting outside or crowded in a neighbor’s home, the importance of having a

permanent indoor common space large enough to accommodate community-wide organizing and socializing. Residents, who work construction in their day-jobs, were able to put their skills to use while others learned for the first time how to spot nails and make corners. Inside, there is a kitchenette and large refrigerator, which are particularly useful during the annual community picnic and when individual households reserve the hall to hold their birthday parties and large family dinners. Regular board meetings take place around a large table – with extra seats for any non-board members who want to attend – and the hall is cleared out for larger membership assemblies. The use of the space is free as long as members stick to the rules – 'no smoking and no alcohol in the building; clean up after yourself.' The hall, therefore, also represents a commons of Pine Ridge.

The material commons of Pine Ridge – including the land and the community hall – facilitate the reproduction of community and individual life, by offering necessary space not only for shelter, but also for a variety of community activities and social relations. They also necessitate the active commoning of co-op members. Members take responsibility for the extensive labor involved in maintaining the commons – mowing grass, removing snow, trimming trees, cleaning the hall, and managing the co-op's financial and administrative paperwork – instead of relying on a landlord or the state to sustain these resources. To help facilitate this maintenance, Pine Ridge members regularly elect a group of their peers to a governing board. They have also used collective funds to purchase necessary tools and equipment, which are now housed in a community-built shed. Material commons thus beget other material commons, and neighbors become collaborators and innovative problem-solvers as well as co-owners. The transition in

property relations from private property to a cooperative, therefore, has the potential to change not only the way that people relate to resources but also to their neighbors.

However, the presence of a material commons or shared resource, in itself, does not necessarily support alternative, or non-normative, modes of social (re)production. While the ownership and management of the land in Pine Ridge has changed from a private investor to the seventy cooperative member households[59], many residents continue to carry on their lives in much the same way as before. This is illustrated, for example, in the fact that members continue to utilize 'rent' to refer to household's monthly payments. Through the endurance of the word, members implicitly (and at times explicitly) suggest that the cooperative's governing board is simply a new landlord – rather than a group of their neighbors who have been democratically elected to maintain the community on a day-to-day basis. On more than one occasion, board members have even had to explain to their fellow members who threaten the cooperative with legal action, that to sue the cooperative would constitute suing themselves. In an ongoing effort to clarify what it means to collectively manage a shared resource, the board has amended the language in the cooperative's rules and bylaws, changing the word 'rent' to 'operations share.' They even hung a full-length mirror in the community hall during a recent annual meeting with a sign over it saying, "Meet your landlord!" As Jeff, a long-term resident and the current co-op board president, puts it; "it's about changing mindsets over time. The key is to get [members] to understand that you're not going to live in a

[59] There are two out of the total seventy-two households that have not joined the cooperative.

trailer park, and you're not going to pay rent and 'that's how we've always done it' comes off the table."[60]

And yet, socio-spatial relations associated with 'how we've always done it' continue to persist to a certain degree, including notions about how the community operates – such as the idea that there is an 'other' body (either an investor owner or the co-op board) responsible for Pine Ridge. Except for the initial years surrounding the organization of the cooperative, the majority of the day-to-day labor involved in managing the community has fallen on the shoulders of a few dedicated co-op members. While some of this distribution of labor was by design – the community bylaws ascribe the administration of the co-op to a seven or eight person board of democratically elected members, each with two-year terms – the current imbalance of labor, according to several board members, is untenable. Initially the labor was to be distributed more broadly through a committee structure, where (non)board members could participate in committees related to differing elements associated with managing the community, including: finance, membership/social, rules enforcement, legal/grievance, neighborhood watch, and maintenance. However, over the years, due to a drop in volunteers, board has had to increasingly take on these responsibilities. Currently, there are no formal committees.

Given the dependence on the volunteer labor of a relatively small number of overburdened members – several of whom struggle with health problems – the co-op board is regularly trying to increase member involvement through a number of strategies, including offering door prizes at meetings, putting important correspondence in red

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[60] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

plastic bags hung on doorknobs, and even placing a poster on the bulletin board over the community mailboxes – the oft-visited location where many co-op members come to get their information as well their mail – with the ubiquitous image of Uncle Sam imploring "*You!*" to volunteer with the cooperative. But the door prizes caused resentment among members who could not attend meetings, and the red plastic bags ended up littering the yards and sidewalks. Uncle Sam remains, but has been crowded by other flyers and notices. Ultimately, the current co-op board members believe that the lack of broad participation has its origins in the original conversations about forming the cooperative. "The mistake that we made was not in starting the co-op, but in how we based the purpose of starting the co-op. We hyped cheap rent. […] To this day this cheap rent thing haunts us. And everyone who sends a check each month feels that sending that check forward completes their obligation to the co-op."[61]

While 'cheap rent' might have initially motivated the formation of the co-op, it does not appear to inspire the ongoing commoning that is required to preserve the community. However, it also reflects the reality of economic precarity[62] and the diverse set of livelihood issues faced by many Pine Ridge members. In these cases, individual material concerns can undermine collective interests. After all, with an unexpected financial hardship a member may ultimately have to leave the community, even if the cooperative temporarily steps in to help. While in theory all members of the co-op have equal access to, and governance of, the material commons of Pine Ridge, competing personal and familial obligations, and health and childcare concerns complicate how

[61] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

[62] As a nonprofit limited-equity cooperative, Pine Ridge offers housing for low-income families. If there is more than one prospective new member, the board must offer membership to the applicant with the lowest income (if after background and credit checks all things are equal between the candidates).

individual members understand and engage with these resources. Many members of Pine Ridge, for instance, are retirees, living on strict budgets, who simply find the co-op to be preferable to other senior housing options – it's "affordable single-story living."[63] Some members of Pine Ridge are physically unable to participate in the labor of maintenance due to illness and disability, while others have limited time as they work full-time for nursing homes, grocery stores, construction companies, or provide in-home care for children and other dependents. Thus, even in a seemingly homogenous community of 'commoners' – for example, the members of Pine Ridge are primarily white, lower-income families – the ways that people are commoning varies widely.

Despite co-owning property, the members of Pine Ridge represent a variety of differing subject positions – distinct experiences, identities, beliefs, and interests. It is in the interstices of these subject positions that commoning has developed slowly and, importantly, unevenly. The presence of uneven commoning has a number of implications for Pine Ridge. For one, it is the members who are more active in everyday commoning that tend to contribute to, and benefit from, the knowledge commons the most. Due to their participation, co-op board members tend to significantly shape how shared resources are managed and utilized. Several have also had opportunities to attend ROC USA-sponsored trainings and regularly interact with technical assistance providers, therein tapping into new flows of knowledge. Secondly, limited participation in commoning threatens the sustainability of the existing commons. Knowledge and practice related to the successful management the community's shared resources has the tendency to become coagulated in a particular set of a few active, and for the most part aging,

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[63] Interview K3, 06.17.13.

members. It is unclear how they will relay unrecorded information about the everyday successes and failures of managing the co-op to a new generation of commoners. Finally, the lack of broad involvement limits the proliferation of new commons in the community by creating mistrust and frustration among members – therein erecting barriers to the development of alternative socio-economic formations. To explore these issues further, I now turn to a finer-grain analytical lens of the nitty-gritty. In the next section, I examine a couple of particular examples of seemingly 'uneven commoning' in Pine Ridge and consider the challenges these present to the community.

III. Uneven commoning

While one can draw a boundary line around the land of Pine Ridge and walk around the community hall, there are other commons that exceed physical borders. For example, the water that comes from two wells located underneath Pine Ridge's property, which all cooperative members utilize, is shared with the nearby town. The chemicals that seep from old cars and contaminants from burning brush on Pine Ridge's land thus not only affect the water quality for co-op residents, but also for the inhabitants of the town. But water and chemicals are not the only flows in this example – knowledge about how to manage this shared resource also circulates, and it serves as an important form of the commons in the community. 'Ann' – a 78-year old resident on disability – has successfully taken care of the co-op's water for sixteen years. Over the years, she has worked to make Pine Ridge members aware of the adverse effects of household oil and chemical spills on their water supply. Driving around the community, Ann would stop and talk to her neighbors when she spotting them changing their vehicle's oil on the

street. Dubbed, 'the water lady,' her mantra to this day is: "What goes in the ground today, you drink tomorrow!"[64] About eight or nine years ago, the state was so impressed with the improvement in water quality, that they prepared an emergency water system backup for the community.

The process of learning how to manage an 'actually existing commons' – such as the well water in Pine Ridge – is improvisational and informal. Ideally it is a collective process, constituting a continually growing and localized 'knowledge commons' (Hardt and Negri 2004), or a collective, and often evolving, set of ideas and understandings. This particular form of 'immaterial commons' includes "practical and discursive bodies of knowledge" that are ultimately "crucial for the reproduction of the space as the commons" on a daily basis – influencing how people interact with shared resources and with each other (Eizenberg 2012:774). Commoning, expanding on the original definition, thus includes the *thinking* as well as the "doing" of the commons – involving the continual (re)production of both material and immaterial commons. As one long-term resident articulated: "[Pine Ridge community has] to learn on [its] own because that is really how [we're] going to learn what is going on."[65] Preferably, then, it is a process of *collective* learning by *collective* doing.

Uneven participation in commoning can then threaten the (re)production of (im)material commons. While knowledge circulates in the community – largely by word of mouth – it also coagulates in certain individual members, along with the responsibility for the majority of labor associated with the day-to-day management of the community. In the instance of water management, Ann is currently the only co-op member who

[64] Interview W4, 07.14.13.
[65] Interview W5, 07.15.13.

knows the location of the more than seventy septic tanks in Pine Ridge, and has assisted with the state mandated water testing process for many years. Not only has she been the principle collector and disseminator of knowledge about water quality, but she has also contributed significant labor to ensure the continued functioning of the water and waste systems in the community. The physical work she has undertaken over the years, from unclogging individual toilets to overseeing the installation of a new community water pump, in turn, has reinforced and contributed to her knowledge about water management. The unevenness of the commoning related to water management – where one member is largely responsible for both the material commons and the related immaterial knowledge commons around water – raises questions about the sustainability of this inflection of the practice. Recent health problems have prevented Ann from participating in the regular upkeep of the community's water and waste systems. The co-op board now worries about the issue of 'succession' – or how to relay Ann's unrecorded information and practices to a new generation of commoners. While she has transmitted some of her knowledge to other members, a certain amount is still bound up in her individual memory and practice.

Uneven commoning can also more directly threaten the material basis of the commons. The specter of 'cheap rent' and the focus on individual economic outcomes by many residents, for example, has meant that until recently, the amount of Pine Ridge members' monthly operation shares had only increased by $1.81 since the community initially became a cooperative – a feat accomplished over the years at the cost of the community's budget, ignoring needed infrastructure repairs, and failing to adjust for inflation. Several board members involved in managing the finances of the co-op understood that a policy of 'cheap rent' would eventually catch up with the community,

but were unable to convince their neighbors until they faced a crisis. Two years ago the co-op significantly overran their budget and an emergency membership meeting was called. It was one of the best-attended meetings and the co-op board explained, dollar-by-dollar, exactly what the thirty-dollar increase to each member's monthly operations share would be paying for, and why it was needed. In this case, then, the primacy of 'cheap rent' gave way to a broader understanding that members were collectively responsible for the financial maintenance of the co-op. Despite many strict personal budgets, the membership accepted the increase because they recognized that it was up to them to collectively raise the funds to cover the cost of necessary community upkeep and improvement.

Even though in this particular moment of financial crisis the co-op members ultimately trusted the knowledge conveyed by the board, uneven participation in labor and knowledge production has also contributed to a certain degree of mistrust. Persisting notions of property relations along with the consolidation of responsibilities in the co-op board, have lead some members to perceive the board as a 'dictatorial group' or 'Big Brother.'[66] This lack of trust has limited the development of broad based commoning and frustrated efforts to produce alternative modes of social reproduction. For example, a few years ago, several Pine Ridge members (most of whom served, or had previously served on the co-op board) formed a 'Helping Hands' committee. In this group members volunteered to help their elderly and ill neighbors with necessities like groceries, cooking, shoveling snow and transportation to doctor's appointments. The aims of Helping Hands included "bridging the concept of cooperative living with reality," and serving as "a

[66] Interview W3, 07.14.13.

safety net for people in need" (Romero 2011:6-7). Yet, many of their fellow members were suspicious of the group, believing that 'you can't get something for nothing,'[67] so enthusiasm for the group ultimately flagged as people failed to ask for the assistance they needed.

For their part, the active co-op members are frustrated about the lack of broad participation in the management of the co-op's resources. According to Jeff, "There's a practical limit to volunteering," and it is ultimately "not fair" when the majority of the everyday (and unpaid) labor involved in managing the community fall on the shoulders of just a few people.[68] Ann attributes this lack of general involvement to personal disputes between members, for which she has little tolerance: "I'm sorry, I call it being baby. In fact, I said one time [that] I'd like to buy a bunch of pacifiers and put them in people's driveways!"[69] She expects members to volunteer on their own, without board members 'pleading' on 'hands and knees' for assistance. Other co-op members, on the other hand, still maintain that it is important "to constantly encourage [other members] to take part, to participate, any chance you get," which will "assist in changing [their] mindset."[70] Most active members recognize, however, that the current unevenness in participation is a problem that needs to be resolved, one way or another, in order to assure the future of Pine Ridge as a cooperative.

While this seemingly uneven commoning in Pine Ridge clearly presents some challenges to the sustainability and expansion of the commons, it also offers the chance

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[67] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

[68] Interview W1, 07.14.13. The tensions that arise from uneven participation in labor are common in other volunteer-run spaces – including social centres where participants have described their role as 'janitors of the revolution' (Pusey forthcoming).

[69] Interview W4, 07.14.13.

[70] Interview W2 and W3, 07.14.13.

to nuance the notion of commoning and reimagine the possibilities for managing 'actually existing commons.' The differences among the co-op members offer opportunities as well as limitations – in Pine Ridge, variances among individual commoners also produce unexpected and innovative forms of commoning. In the following section, I aim to present how in a context of a seemingly 'paradoxical space' (Rose 1994), *differential commoning* is remaking the socio-spatial relations in Pine Ridge. Instead of attempting to provide a comprehensive framework or particular management structure for the commons, I highlight tendencies and suggest future directions of this mode of commoning.

IV. Differential commoning

Clearly conflicting interests and perspectives intersect in any community, and inevitably shape the nature of everyday commoning. This is perhaps especially true when considering a set of commons within a context of "actually existing neoliberalism" (Brenner and Theodore 2002).[71] In this space, (im)material commons exist as "a contested arena of opposites, ambiguities, and as a paradigmatic site for the examination of struggles over space and the spatially embedded potentialities for social change" (Eizenberg 2012:779). It is a 'paradoxical space' (Rose 1993), where individual and collective interests coexist – a one that can be simultaneously "anti (against), despite (in)

[71] Amid the revival of interest in the commons, some scholars have cautioned against assuming that the use of 'the commons' necessarily indicates an alternative to normative socio-economic relations, and have thus sought to distinguish between those commons that serve capitalist aims, and those that are contrary (either explicitly or implicitly) to hegemonic economic and political structures (Virno 2004; Caffentzis 2004; Caffentzis 2010; Federici 2010; Hardt 2010b; Beverungen et al. 2013). George Caffentzis (2010:25), for one, differentiates between 'pro-capitalist commons,' which are "compatible with and potentiate capitalist accumulation," and 'anti-capitalist commons,' which are "antagonistic to and subversive of capitalist accumulation."

and post (beyond) capitalist" (Chatterton et al. 2013:611). This paradoxical nature is clearly visible in Pine Ridge. Together, the seventy co-op members of Pine Ridge 'own' and manage a collective debt – as well as eight-acres of land. While the commons are often considered to be in opposition to – or at least outside of – capitalism in general, and debt specifically (Graeber 2011; Federici 2013), the collectivization of debt in a cooperative means that this shared mortgage could arguably be considered an 'immaterial' commons (with real material effects). This mortgage has given residents of Pine Ridge the opportunity to control material commons, and develop alternative, non-capitalist modes of social reproduction – even as it is tied into the economic system of capitalism.[72] While the co-op board has sought to change the terminology of 'rent' to 'operations share,' in a sense part of members' monthly payment is still 'rent' – albeit a *collective* 'rent' – which goes towards paying off the co-op's mortgage. Thus, within (im)material commons, normative property and market relations operate alongside noncapitalist, alternative ones – harmoniously and, at times, discordantly.

In this paradoxical space of 'actually existing commons,' where multiple structural elements are at play, the different ways that commoners interact with the commons can develop into specific relations of unevenness and privilege. This 'uneven commoning' can be considered in a variety of differing ways. Some readers and scholars may read the nitty-gritty details of commoning in the community as a form of the 'tragedy of the commons,' or more likely as a breakdown in the particular management structure of the co-op. Others might read the unevenness of participation in commoning

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[72] This is even more explicit in manufactured housing cooperatives that receive their loans from commercial banks – whereas the Pine Ridge cooperative received a loan from a community loan fund, which operates as a nonprofit community development financial institution (CDFI).

as a failure of the politicization of the residents of Pine Ridge – the fact that they do not have cohesive language and goals with which to position their project as a political one. However, while these analyses provide important insights, I turn to read the difficulties and seeming paradoxes in Pine Ridge, as iterations of what I call 'differential commoning.' In order to reveal the dimensions of this form of commoning in this section, I initially address the former possible readings and then consider differential commoning tendencies that currently exist in Pine Ridge. Finally I raise a number of open theoretical and pragmatic questions about what a commoning project would look like that builds on difference in ways that resist enrollment in structural unevenness.

Reading tragedy into the commons

On the one hand, the uneven commoning in Pine Ridge could be seen as a form of 'tragedy' – not of the commons per se – but of the management of the commons. Even Garrett Hardin (1994) – following his (in)famous 1968 article, "The Tragedy of the Commons" – clarified his position to argue that 'tragedy' occurs when the commons are unmanaged, or perhaps even ill-managed. For their part, common property scholars (Dietz et al. 2003; Ostrom 1990) have sought to build a "science of resource managerialism" (Goldman 1997:21), in which commoners are often considered to be "rational economic agents" and "appropriators" of common resources. In this scenario, members organize as an "appropriator organization" (AO) based on a cost-benefit analysis, in which "the perceived benefits of organization exceed the perceived cost of organization" (Ostrom 1992:300). In the instance of Pine Ridge, faced with eviction, individual residents did favor the option of joining together and organizing a cooperative,

which allowed them to stay in their community and maintain 'cheap rent.' The co-op board and committee structure offered an initial structure to clarify membership (who is and is not a member), rights and responsibilities of members, and mechanisms for decisionmaking and conflict resolution (297). The current uneven commoning could then be seen in this instance as a breakdown of this structure, as represented in the collapse of the committee structure and consolidation of responsibilities in the co-op board. In this case, the lack of broad volunteership among co-op members could be considered a form of the 'collective action problem' – in which individual (in)actions effect collective outcomes (Olson 2000, [1965]; Ostrom 2005) – threatening the sustainability of the co-op and inhibiting the creation of new commons.

However, framing Pine Ridge residents as individualistic 'rational economic agents' – focused primarily, for example, on 'cheap rent' – arguably precludes most members, except for 'appointed managers' (co-op board members), from serving as active commoners (Hardin 1994). In other words, commoning becomes narrowly defined for most members – to simply paying their monthly operation share and voting in annual membership meetings. This economic perspective – in which there is little or no recognized divergence between the commons and "the smooth functioning of the 'market'" (Caffentzis 2010:30) – tends to veil the political, social and ethical dimensions of the commons and of individual commoners. When asked what "resident-ownership" or a "cooperative" means to them personally, in addition to discussing affordability and property ownership, most of the members of Pine Ridge mention at least one of the following: community, collective responsibility, cooperation, democratic governance, and trust. How these identified elements of the co-op are understood and enacted clearly

varies from member to member – but these variations are, generally speaking, currently not incorporated into the governance structure of the cooperative.

Reading for common politics

For another set of commons scholars (De Angelis 2003; Hardt and Negri 2009; Roggero 2010), rather than individual commoners acting as 'rational economic agents,' it is 'communities' – defined as "social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange that are not reduced to the market form" (De Angelis 2003:1) – which should determine how to manage shared resources and therein develop an 'immaterial' knowledge commons. The social production of this 'inexhaustible' and constantly expanding 'immaterial commons – or 'the common'[73] – arguably contains a 'subversive possibility' and a basis for creating alternatives to the alienating processes of global capitalism (Hardt and Negri 2009). Those co-op members in Pine Ridge who have been most involved in commoning – as the thinking as well as the doing of the commons – frequently imagine other potential collective projects, such as the Helping Hands project and the bulk-buying of food and fuel for the community. However, the lack of broad-based participation in commoning has limited the 'subversive' and creative potential of the knowledge commons. Instead of a fairly cohesive understanding of what it means to collectively manage a commons, there are still a number of different, and at times contradictory, knowledges and narratives circulating in Pine Ridge related to the distinct subject positions of individual co-op members.

[73] Hardt and Negri (2004) differentiate between the contemporary technologically-enabled and largely immaterial collaboration and communication of 'the common' and the pre-capitalist materiality of 'the commons.'

Given that the members that make up Pine Ridge are diverse rather than homogenous, evolving rather than static, it is thus necessary to situate commoning within a complex system of material and immaterial concerns and priorities. Therefore, while some commons scholars debate the transformative nature of material commons on the one hand, and immaterial commons on the other[74] – they are often co-constituted through everyday *commoning*. In other words, material commons support, and are in turn supported by, immaterial knowledge commons – or, to put it another way, "the dimension of *what* is shared and of *how* [it] is shared must go hand in hand" (Massimo De Angelis 2007:244, emphasis original). Thus, the extent of the commoning of Pine Ridge members can limit or support the continual (re)production – and possible expansion – of the (im)material commons. It is in recognizing and accepting points of contradiction as well as congruence amid these multiple (im)material commons that more broad-based alternatives to normative socio-economic relations have the potential to surface.

(Re)reading differential commoning

While the previous readings reveal certain aspects of managing the commons, here, I move towards reframing 'uneven commoning' in terms of 'differential commoning.' Recognizing that social organizations inevitably (re)produce certain power relations and hierarchies (Smith 2008, [1984]), this approach entails viewing unevenness as a problem to be continually grappled with rather than a tendency that can be eliminated. In addition, utilizing Gibson-Graham's (2008:11) strategy of "reading for

[74] Silvia Federici (2010) has suggested that this division in the discourse tends to fall along gender lines – women writing about the commons generally focus on the material processes of social reproduction (Federici 2011; Gibson-Graham 2004, 2006), whereas men tend to highlight the production of immaterial commons (Roggero 2010; Hardt & Negri 2004; Carlsson 2007; Lessig 2001).

difference," I seek not only to make difference visible, but also to consider new possibilities and strategies related to this form of commoning. Even as they share common resources, the members of Pine Ridge occupy a variety of differing subject positions. Without accounting for this complexity, differences amongst community members that shape how they relate to a particular resource and to each other are erased. This erasure, in turn, threatens the sustainability of the commons because it fails to allow for diverse engagements with shared resources, leading instead to unevenness. It is therefore necessary to situate commoning practices within a context of multifaceted socio-economic concerns and shifting knowledges, rather than to simply consider them in terms of the rigidity of economic rationality or the homogeneity of some imagined community.

Co-op members in Pine Ridge already participate in commoning in a variety of (in)formal ways – and these engagements change over time. For example, when the co-op decided to build the community hall and tool shed, members who had construction skills and access to building materials volunteered their time, labor and expertise – even if they had not previously (or since) participated in the co-op in other capacities besides paying their monthly operations share. In the last couple of years, members have organized a community-wide potluck – an effort that has included a number of non-board members, who for example, coordinate the food so that they "don't have all potato salad."[75] Several less active members have also organized activities and resources for children in the community. 'Beth,' who initially moved into the community in 1978 and babysat for many of the neighborhood families over the years, successfully advocated for the co-op

[75] Interview W8, 07.16.13.

to install a playground in Pine Ridge. Usually preferring to keep to herself and self-identifying as "not the kind of person that likes to get out in front of people and fight for a vote," it was the first (and perhaps only) time she engaged in the formal co-op process.[76] One summer, 'Kate,' a woman originally from Hong Kong who now provides in-home care for her ailing husband, ran programs for children in the community hall. While she no longer has the time to organize these activities, the boxes of children's games and toys are still stored in the hall. She hopes to reestablish the program sometime in the future – ideally with some assistance.

Thus, outside the formal management structure of the co-op board and committees – often mobilized around specific needs, interests or crisis – differential commoning includes a diverse set of practices, occurring at different times and sites around the community. The extent of this commoning is often shaped by a number of extenuating circumstances – such as livelihood, health and familial concerns – and therefore, it is often short-lived. But while some differential commoning may seem peripheral to the main tasks involved in managing the commons, it still "carries with it a set of ethical values and relations, such as responsibility to another," that may ultimately offer a means "for questioning and critiquing existing economic relations," (Carlone 2013:529). Furthermore, it creates space that has the "potential to become something other" (Gibson-Graham 2004:33). In other words, as they "piece together collective forms of creating and exchanging [...] in order to meet concrete needs," (Bresnihan and Byrne 2014:1) Pine Ridge residents are experimenting with new ways of living and working together – of collectively engaging with a variety of (im)material commons.

[76] Interview W12, 07.14.13.

Exactly how these moments and threads of differential commoning weave together to form an ongoing, flexible means of managing the commons is still unclear. But, Pine Ridge offers several suggestions. First, given that every community faces unique challenges and opportunities, it would seem important that a program is site-specific and embedded within current localized socio-spatial relations, rather than a rigid model. The fact that any community – regardless of how seemly homogenous – inevitability faces ongoing change and variable challenges, highlights the need for an iterative process. As some co-op board members now recognize, while "rules are the basic structure, […] the ability to use some common sense and get some variances and some leeway so people can live is important."[77] Allowing for a certain degree of flexibility and 'bricolage' is key for the sustainability of the management of the commons over time. Second, it seems critical to account for the diversity of the ways that commoners understand and interact with shared resources. These inevitably change over time for an individual. For example, 'Ann,' who was once riding a mower and checking septic tanks, is no longer able to volunteer as she used to due to health problems. Instead of providing physical labor towards managing material commons, she now primarily contributes to the immaterial knowledge commons of Pine Ridge by sharing her expertise with fellow commoners. Diverse entry points into, and continued flexibility in, participation allows commoning to evolve with the needs of commoners as individuals and as a collective. Third, building and maintaining trust demands that commoners recognize and encourage different kinds of community engagement – even if they are not sustained over time. While 'minor' hierarchies or 'microfascisms' (Deleuze and Guattari

[77] Interview W1, 07.14.13.

2014, [1987]) will likely emerge within commoning, the key is to resist their stabilization and proliferation.

These ‘glimmers’ (Gibson-Graham 2006:51) of differential commoning in Pine Ridge not only help maintain Pine Ridge’s (im)material commons, but also expands them. This is because they offer creative and productive breaks in, or disruptions of, normative narratives, socio-spatial relations and subjectivities. Instead of dismissing them as short-lived or one-off efforts, it thus seems important to embrace these acts of differential commoning and encourage their proliferation. Needless to say, the challenge is to do so without simultaneously capturing or institutionalizing them in a rigid management structure. The question of *how* to do so seems only answerable through a continuous process of localized trial and error: differential commoning.

V. (In)Conclusion

As an “affirmation of singularities” rather than a “category of conformity” (Hardt and Negri 2009:124), the formation of a generic definition of the commons – and commoning – is not only difficult, but arguably ill-advised. Nonetheless, with the recent proliferation of the commons in academic and praxical contexts there has been a corresponding tendency to try to categorize and differentiate between instances of commoning – such as (im)material and (non)capitalist. While these efforts are useful in illustrating the range of activities and spaces that ‘the commons’ now represents, they tend to simplify complexity and erase differences within the ‘actually existing commons.’ As illustrated in the consideration of the nitty-gritty commoning in Pine Ridge, this is a category of differentiation and seeming paradoxes. Tendencies emerge, co-exist and

depart depending on the particular geographical, temporal, and social context. The socio-spatial relations that co-constitute the commons are thus in constant flux, "producing fluid and often unpredictable groupings and initiatives" (Holder and Flessas 2008:300).

The project of considering Pine Ridge as a commons – or set of commons – has allowed for an "exploration of complex spatialities and temporalities" (Gibson-Graham 2006:72) within this particular community. The differential commoning tendencies in Pine Ridge have a non-linear directionality and make up a more textured reality of 'the commons.' The potential of the commons perhaps exists not in the capacity to develop a fixed framework or set of characterizations – to render social relations 'legible' (Scott 1998) as a form of 'capital' (such as concepts like 'social capital') – but to acknowledge the divergences and paradoxes that exist in the everyday activities and relations involved in the collective management of a common resource. As paradoxical spaces – consisting of capitalist and noncapitalist relations, individual and collective interests – 'actually existing commons' should thus not be measured against some theoretical ideal or static form, but rather considered as "a springboard" for critiquing normative socio-economic relations (Eizenberg 2012:779), and a means of producing a 'specific theory' that is "lodged in an expanding present, a present in which it is simultaneously possible to ask philosophical questions that open up empirical work and to pose critical historical questions about the categories" of the commons (Galison 2004:383). In recognizing the transitory, active and grounded nature of differential commoning, in this paper I have sought to identify localized *commoning tendencies* that emerge amid the nitty-gritty of the commons. While these tendencies may have a general orientation – for example,

(non)capitalist – they do not a set character nor destination. Differential commoning is thus simultaneously a realm of actuality and potentiality.

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A recent state law changed the 'buffer area' around water wells to fifteen hundred feet, which means that at least part of Pine Ridge constitutes illegal development. While the co-op has been given variances, members remain in regular negotiation with the Department of Environmental Services (DES) and the nearby town officials over the appropriate use of this land.[78] The owner of the land that surrounds most of the cooperative is also anxious to buy Pine Ridge. He ostensibly wants to preserve the community, even offering to upgrade the infrastructure and, at least initially, to keep rent low. Thus, the commons of Pine Ridge – like the commons everywhere – are in constant threat of enclosure from the state and the market. Ultimately, then, "[t]here is no way of making the organization of the commons neat and clear because the boundaries of the commons are always contested" (Bresnihan and Byrne forthcoming:12). However, the potentiality to be something other – to multiply the commons and broaden participation in commoning – exists in (im)material commons. This is a contested and paradoxical space – truly 'an actually existing commons' – one that is both actualized and yet to be actualized.

[78] Interview W2, 07.14.13.

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Conclusion

"[The co-op] is an upheaval! You know us humans, we don't like change. It takes us awhile – even if it's for the good… especially when peoples' minds are set like cement."[79]

"At such a moment of interruption in the way things are and should be, and in the angry feelings toward the world and the self that the interruption provokes, demands may be forged to recreate what is lost, but a turning is also possible" (Gibson-Graham 2006:41).

The moment that a manufactured housing community is put up for sale, residents face an interruption – or 'upheaval' – in their lives. The lack of control over their homes and communities that they have endured for years is made explicit as they face possible eviction or another landlord who will likely increase rent and change the rules. However, as suggested in Gibson-Graham's quote above, this moment offers the possibility of 'a turning' – a turning away from the status quo, from 'capitalocentrism;' a turning toward greater community control, toward socio-economic alternatives. And this turning operates on the level of individual as well as the collective.

While many scholars and activists consider moments of crisis or 'interruption' to be the impetus for social change, there is more ambiguity about how to sustain this (re)formation. In other words, how does one escape the tendency to "recreate what is lost" – to turn a full 360 degrees? How can we instead forge 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) or a 'politics of becoming' 'other' (Gibson-Graham 2006)? These are questions that I find myself asking as I spend time in the manufactured housing co-ops.

[79] Interview LE5, 07.21.13.

The members of these communities are constantly (re)negotiating what it means to be a collective – to be a cooperative within in 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner & Theodore 2002). Individually and collectively they are in constant motion – turning in different, sometimes-contradictory directions. The material and immaterial space of the co-op, or the commons, is thus one of multiple paradoxical motions and minor moments of disruption – and of potentialities.

When I started this thesis project, I was initially overwhelmed as I tried to untangle and make sense of the seeming paradoxes and moving parts of socio-spatial relations in these communities. I did not want to smooth over the differences and tensions that make up localized spaces. But I was also not sure where to start. So, I decided to start 'in the middle' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), and examine points of friction and disjunction more closely. While they are at times demobilizing – resulting, for example, in interpersonal conflict and a lack of broad participation – these moments can also be distinctly productive. And in many ways, they need to be constructive. For better or worse, these co-op members are tied together by material need. Therefore, they have to make the co-op work one-way or another. As individuals and a collective, they continuously experiment with different ways of interacting with shared resources and each other. This dynamic process of trial and error is then always multiple – neither unified nor unidirectional.

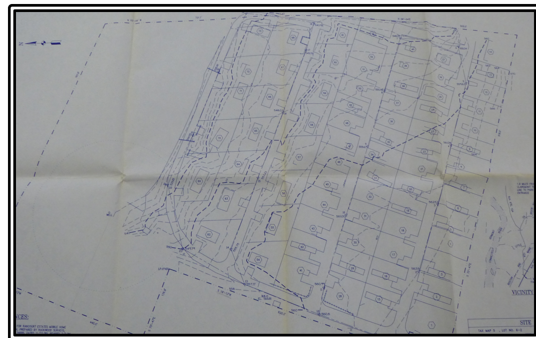

Figure 1. Property map of Pine Ridge.

This particular line of inquiry of the thesis has resonances with Gibson-Graham's (2006, 2008) model of a 'diverse' or 'community economy,' which recognizes a broad range of practices and 'assets' that are frequently rendered invisible by 'capitalocentrism.' These include "economic practices that sustain lives and maintain wellbeing directly […], that distribute surplus to the material and cultural maintenance of the community and that actively make and share a commons" (Gibson-Graham 2008:16). In this thesis project, I have aimed to make the diversity of (non)capitalist commoning practices in manufactured housing cooperatives visible. However, I have also focused on times and spaces where things seem to break down – the interruptions and frictions that inevitably emerge in daily socio-economic interactions on the neighborhood level. In other words, in addition to recognizing the range of (non)capitalist practices in these communities, I have sought to analyze *how these practices work – or, do not work*.

This is one reason I chose to engage with the discourse of the commons in this thesis – rather than of community economies. The history of the commons has been one marked by conflict – both in terms of the challenges of self-management and the ongoing threat of enclosure. But there has been little attention to the nitty-gritty aspects of how the commons work (or do not work) on the local level. Thus, I have aimed in this thesis to make an intervention in the current thinking about the commons – one that allows for difference.

It is this common/difference that largely drove my thesis project – specifically how this seeming paradox is expressed in practice: the 'both/and' moment of differential commoning. I see this to be not only a theoretically useful endeavor, but also a praxical and methodological one. For instance, it helps to think through a number of practical –

and theoretically engaging – questions: how can co-op members organize with – rather than in spite of – difference, in relation to the commons? Is it possible, in a community, to not simply accommodate, but also encourage multiple ways of commoning and being a commoner? If so, how can commoners maintain a level of accountability and transparency? The answers to these questions are inevitably embedded in particular geographical and temporal contexts – but there may be ways of identifying tendencies across localities.

It is this identification of tendencies that is reflected in another thread of this project, relating to methodology and the production of knowledge. Keeping in mind Sedgwick's (2003) notion of the "performativity of knowledge," throughout this thesis, I have sought to develop research strategies that "proliferate new knowledges" and acknowledge alternative economic possibilities (Brown et al 2011:126). First, I focused on the 'nitty-gritty' details of collective property and commoning practices in specific communities, which produced a more textured picture of socio-spatial relations. This required close observation of, and participation in, daily practices and discourses – and attention to the disjunctures in both. Second, acknowledging the "impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:112) and that knowledge is always partial (McDowell 1992), I have sought to offer slippery rather than unyielding concepts – ones which hopefully will facilitate multiple ideas.

Finally, I have considered the production of research outcomes to be an inherently political act, which is why I have intended to speak across multiple audiences. While often overlooked in the consideration of academic methodologies and epistemologies, research outcomes and modes of knowledge production are materially and

representationally important in (re)thinking the role of the geographer in the academy and the broader society. In the midst of policy, public and participatory turns in geography, feminist epistemologies, in particular, have moved the thinking on knowledge (co)production forward in ways that enable the construction of solidarity between academic and nonacademic communities. As Kinpaisby (2008:294) has suggested with the term "communiversity," there is a need to "rework what we can do through the community as academics, using our talents, our abilities, our resources, to do other things simply than write journal articles and achieve academic accolades." Knowledge production is, after all, political.

By structuring this thesis project as two articles, I hope to engage both academics and practitioners on a praxical and theoretical level. But, I offer only two – among many – ways of examining manufactured housing cooperatives. There are, however, themes from this project that I plan to carry forward into future research. I will likely continue to utilize epistemologies and methodologies drawn from the feminist geographic tradition – including engaging with diverse audiences and enrolling multiple theoretical and praxical discourses. I also intend to keep thinking through and negotiating the inevitable relationship between research and politics.

Finally, I hope to continue to explore the concept of differential commoning in other contexts – especially where there are transitions in socio-propertarian relations. For example, as part of a research project with Professor Keith Woodward, I plan to explore 'differential commoning' in "Freetown Christiania" – one of the largest and oldest squats in Europe, located in Copenhagen, Denmark. Residents of Christiania recently accepted an agreement with the Danish government to collectively purchase much of the land they

currently occupy. I am interested in exploring ‘differential commoning’ in this space where – after years of resisting the notion of ‘private property’ – residents are explicitly enrolled in differing relations of property. The ‘Tower of David’ in Caracas, Venezuela is another possible context in which to explore differential commoning. After squatting in an abandoned skyscraper for eight years, residents are now being moved by the state into social housing outside the city. Again, this change in socio-propertarian relations will likely have a number of impacts on how residents interact with shared resources – and with each other. However, there are multiple contexts in which to explore differential commoning – these are simply a couple of initial ideas.

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